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Notes on

Popular Rationalism

BY

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Notes on Popular Rationalism.

FROM many sides the unpalatable and threatening fact is being forced on the notice of Christian folk, that an extensive alienation from the Faith of Christ has taken place within the confines of Christendom, and that a new and more vigorous crusade of materialism has come into existence. A crusade, indeed, it may fairly be called, for all the accustomed features of a religious war are found in it. Propagandist zeal, not unworthy of the fanatic enthusiasts who sent abroad the torch of war in the sluggish society of mediæval Europe, now moves men to attack by word and pen the long-established empire of the

Christian religion. The Rationalist Press Association pours into the country a stream of cheap literature, various in quality, including works of abiding importance, and, together with them, long obsolete productions of aggressive unbelief, and this mingled literature serves as the Bible of the orators and journalists of materialism, who in every part of the country, and especially in the great manufacturing centres, are pressing home the attack on the citadel of national Faith. There are reasons why the dawn of the twentieth century should be an eminently favourable period for a campaign of materialism, a crusade to recover from the Christians the sacred soil of the human spirit which they have possessed so long.

The time is ripe for conflict, for another crucial phase of the perpetual warfare between the flesh and the spirit. It is worth while to attempt a preliminary

estimate of the situation in which we now stand, for until we have a perception not altogether inaccurate of the actual problem before us, it will be labour lost for us to discuss the nature of its solution.

Four circumstances of modern life appear to promise great advantages to the present attack on historic Christianity.

1. Once more a serious rival to the religion of Christ is in the field. At all times, as we have just indicated, there proceeds the warfare which may be described by many antitheses, but by none more effectively and more justly than by the familiar antitheses of the New Testament, the "flesh" and the "spirit" of St. Paul, "the world" and "the Father" of St. John. This moral conflict, coeval and coextensive with mankind, has many forms and many descriptions. In the intellectual sphere truth wrestles with

error : in the social sphere justice strives with oppression ; in the sphere of individual action right and wrong are for ever proposing themselves to the will. Always and everywhere religion in its essence assumes and makes explicit this manifold moral conflict. Underneath all historic descriptions and systems this is the core and hidden meaning of it.

> Is not God now i' the world His power first made?
> Is not His love at issue still with sin,
> Visibly when a wrong is done on earth ?

Both factors in the great antithesis, both the mystic rivals, whose strife fills the world and creates the hidden tragedy of every human life, appear to have the same historic course. Religion expresses itself in the religions of mankind ; irreligion expresses itself in organized error. To speak thus is, of course, to use terms at once far too general and far too sweeping for the facts ; but roughly, and with

allowance for a vast amount of strange moral interlacement and overlapping, the proposition is true. The religions of the world have been both the products and the instruments of its moral effort, and they have ever had against them organized and powerful systems of immorality in its widest sense. Often, indeed, names and facts have gone apart : religion has carried on its warfare outside the accepted religious descriptions, and these have been borrowed by the forces of error ; but underneath all the confusions, the fact remains that on both sides there have been epochs of energy, " times of refreshing " and of " the power of darkness." Now we contend that the radical and persistent delusion of mankind, parent of all error and condition of all vice, the delusion of materialism or naturalism, comes before us now with a cogency and a persuasiveness which have never been equalled before. The progress of what

are called *par excellence* the sciences has been so rapid ; the results attained by processes and on assumptions, which seem (though, indeed, do but seem) to ignore the being and providence of God, have been so amazing, that there appears immense plausibility in the contention that, along the present lines of scientific research, lies the solution of the whole problem of man's nature, and that it is only a matter of time before " the riddle of the universe " is read in the cold white light of scientific demonstration. The imagination has for the moment been captured by science, and induced to play the traitor to faith. Religion, the source and sole guarantee of man's supremacy, has taken the aspect of a creed humbling and libellous, and to complete the paradox, humanity, under the megalomania of physical science, emulously claims equality with the beasts that perish. Science in common speech has become a

new religion, and commends its claims, after the common fashion of all new religions, by displays of miracles and an immense parade of enthusiasm. A religion, indeed, it may claim to be, for it professes to serve all the purposes of religion. It has its creed, its moral code, its ecclesiastical organization, its missionaries, its ordained exponents. There is no part of human nature which is left outside its dogmatism. It expounds the origin, narrates the course, prophesies the future of the universe; and it is so rich in knowledge, so audacious in experiment, so flushed with victory that it carries men's intellects by storm. Science in common parlance (which mostly means in the speech of those who know but little of the teachings, and are wholly destitute of the spirit, of science) stands before us as the rival of religion, but assuredly this is not the aspect, still less the character, of science itself.

True science, we shall maintain, is always a genuine *praeparatio evangelica*, and, under its austere disciplines, the conscience and the understanding are trained into a congruity with a higher truth than they, unhelped, can attain to. Lord Bacon's famous declaration has been echoed by the princes of science continuously, and never more clearly than in our own time. "I had rather believe all the fables in the legend, and the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind; and therefore God never wrought miracle to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it. It is true that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion: for while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no further; but when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate,

and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity." *

I have not said, nor do I think, that science is the handmaid of that ever shifting yet ever unyielding conglomerate of pious opinion which is called "orthodoxy"; on the contrary, I am rather disposed to agree with a modern philosopher that "our orthodox theology on the one hand, and our common-place materialism on the other vanish like ghosts before the daylight of free sceptical inquiry," † though I should, perhaps, demur to his account of "our orthodox theology." Science and religion cannot properly be rivals; but it is certain that, as those venerable names are commonly

* Essay xvi., "Of Atheism," p. 111. Bacon's Essays, *ed.* Reynolds. 1890.

† The words are those of Dr. F. H. Bradley, and I borrow them from Professor Andrew Seth's "Man's place in the Cosmos," where they are quoted in the course of a criticism of Dr. Bradley's metaphysics, p. 96.

employed in popular discussions, they are the labels of immitigable conflict. The blame for this unhappy confusion is not to be laid only on one side ; indeed it is hard to say whether "science" or "religion" is most heavily weighted with perversions and misconceptions. But, be the blame due where it may, the situation at present is unhappily too plain to be mistaken. Religion, which of course means for the modern world Christianity, is challenged with an almost jubilant confidence by science, and that challenge was never more eagerly welcomed than by the curious and discontented multitudes of nominally Christian folk, who stand in an attitude of resentful suspicion outside the Churches into which they have been baptized. The existence of those multitudes indicates the second great advantage which is possessed by the most recent opponents of the Faith of Christ.

2. For the first time in human history the masses of the labouring people are educated up to the point of being able to take an interest in the questions at issue. The knowledge gained in the elementary schools is not great, nor is it always well chosen, but the mere fact of having to gain it implies a stimulating of natural intelligence, and the possession of the power to read, itself almost the equivalent of a new natural faculty. It argues nothing against the ability and character of the artisans to say of them that they often lack the power to appreciate the knowledge to which their education has introduced them, and that their manner of life interposes formidable obstacles in the way of a sane exercise of their judicial sense. Even in Scotland, where thanks to a great educational tradition, to the remarkable stimulus given to individuality by the course of the national history, and not least to the mental

vigour of the Scottish people, the standard of general intelligence is exceptionally high, this is to some extent the case ; but in England, where a thousand circumstances have retarded the intellectual development of the working classes, there can be little question as to the general truth of what has been said. An intelligent artisan is more often than not a man of strong prejudices, narrow outlook on life, limited acquaintance with books, little leisure. He may be, and often is, a man of high character, good natural abilities, and a keen intellectual interest ; but he comes to his thinking under great disadvantages, which are none the less great because he is not responsible for them, and because they appear to be, so far as we can see, to a great extent inseparable from artisan life. His education has wakened his curiosity, stirred his ambitions, raised his self-esteem ; but it has not chastened his

character or equipped him with any effective power to detect sophistry, or appraise arguments. The literature of resuscitated rationalism comes to him with the factitious recommendation of novelty: it opens a new world of audacious speculation to his thought: it blends subtly with his natural prejudices: it finds a hundred warranties of truth in his own observations. It is always logical, positive, very close to facts, confident in its promises, brilliant in its scorn of everything mysterious. The more he reads, the more he wants to read. He too often becomes the unreasoning partisan, the fanatic of materialism, the zealot for science, before he really has considered the other side at all or the interests at stake in the conflict. He resembles nothing so much as a generous undergraduate swept away by the interests which in such a hot-house of young enthusiasms as an university seize on him

in swift succession. Now he is a sentimental anarchist with Shelley ; now he wields the flail of the iconoclast with Carlyle ; now he vents the most blood-curdling pessimism with Schopenhauer ; now he works havoc in the sanctuary with the last German critic ; now he scourges himself or groans Gregorians in the ardours of neo-Anglican asceticism, and so *ad infinitum* until time and experience lay their sobering disciplines on his spirit, and he attains the slower mental pace and sterner moral standard of manhood. In time the artisan, like the undergraduate, will learn to suspect the sweeping and simple reasoning which left no place anywhere for the mysterious or the unexplained, and he will not find novelty the most constant attribute of truth, nor scorn the most becoming temper of inquiry, nor logic the only reasonable instrument of attaining conviction. But just now, when the first generation of

educated artisans is face to face with the ancient yet always new controversy, which for them has the form of a conflict between Religion and Science, it is nothing to be wondered at that the unthinking credulity of the undergraduate is more apparent than the sober discrimination of the man.

3. Curiosity is near kin to discontent, and it is known to every social student that modern society is penetrated with discontent. How could it be otherwise? Society has always offered to the gaze of its thoughtful members a strange and distressing enigma; and now the thoughtful members of society are no more a few recluses of the study or the cloister, but multitudes in every class, and certainly not least in the most puzzled and laborious class of all. "See how we die an' no need, one way an' another"—says Stephen Blackpool in "Hard Times"—"in a muddle—every day!" That sums

up the vague resentment which predisposes men to unbelief, and flares up in the crimes of anarchism under circumstances of special provocation. "A muddle! aw a muddle!"—the words are a modern echo of the solemn pessimism of the preacher: "Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of the oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter." * It would be easy to accumulate examples of the discontent which everywhere emerges into view in the literature of our time. What Matthew Arnold has well called "the hopeless tangle of our age" † enters in some form or other into even the most sheltered and fortunate lives; but to the thoughtful

* Eccl. iv. 1.

† Stanzas in memory of the author of "Obermann," Lyric Elegiac poems, p. 225 [London, 1885].

artisans, to whom the problem of social hardship is a new one, and does not so much amuse their leisure as reveal to them their experience, that "tangle" brings fresh confirmation to the questionings and suspicions which have visited their minds. Christianity, as they see it embodied in ancient Churches, bound up with interests which are not theirs, and with traditions which they neither like nor comprehend, wakes against itself resentments which go far to incline them to lend a kindly hearing to the case against it. The very greatness of the Christian theory is turned with terrific force into an indictment of its truth when the inadequate practice which it has enabled is set forth in contrast. The artisans are not for the most part students of Browning's poetry, but the sentiments of despondent incredulity, which are moved in them by the apparent failure of Christianity to be equal to the

assumption of its own creed, could not be more effectively uttered than in the soliloquy of the aged Pope in " The Ring and the Book " :

> And is this little all that was to be ?
> Where is the gloriously decisive change,
> Metamorphosis the immeasurable
> Of human clay to divine gold, we looked
> Should in some poor sort justify its price ?
> Had an adept of the mere Rosy Cross
> Spent his life to consummate the Great Work,
> Would not we start to see the stuff it touched
> Yield not a grain more than the vulgar got
> By the old smelting-process years ago ?
> If this were sad to see in just the sage
> Who should profess so much, perform no more,
> What is it when suspected in that Power
> Who undertook to make and made the world,
> Devised and did effect man, body and soul,
> Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . . .
> Well, is the thing we see, salvation ?

4. Finally, we must add that on the side of Christianity there are circumstances which facilitate the task of the enemy. In all ages of the Church the most damaging attack on the faith has

been the silent disproof of Christian sincerity by the scandals of Christian practice. Most of all have the furious disputes of Christians among themselves damaged the credit of religion, and hindered men from embracing it. Julian the Apostate was not lacking in shrewdness when he gave liberty of discussion to the quarrelsome Christians of the fourth century in the expectation that, by thus securing the destruction of religious harmony, he should paralyze Christianity.* And certainly few circumstances more unfavourable to the credit of religion could be imagined than that its professors should habitually display before the very people whom they design to attract to Christianity, the repulsive and perplexing spectacle of domestic strife. "For Heaven's sake,

* Ammianus Marcellinus, xxii. 5. "Ut dissensiones augente licentia non timeret unanimantem postea plebem."

sir, don't talk to me about religion," was the observation with which I was received by an artisan on whom I was making a pastoral visit, and he went on to explain to me in forcible language that he lived in a din of religious quarrelling everywhere, as it seemed to him, save in his own house, and there, at least, he was resolved to have peace. Our present controversies are increasingly seen in historic succession to a dreary record of crime and conflict in the name of religion, which runs through the ages like a river of blood, and seems to justify the most violent denunciations of the modern opponents of Christianity. The whole weight of long past scandals has to be borne by the modern Church, and the black chapters of Christian history, which Christians would gladly forget, are read by myriads of intelligent artisans, to whom they come with the alluring charm of novelty. At a time when all authority,

secular and spiritual, is on its trial, the authority of the Christian society is discounted by the follies of fanaticism and the continuing scandal of religious strife.

It will be evident that, if this be a substantially true account of the present situation, we have good reason to expect that the new Rationalist movement, to which I have referred, will run great lengths and gain large successes. How ought that movement to be handled by the Christian Church? That is a question which the responsible leaders of the Church must consider with care, and answer with decision. Private Christians cannot absolve themselves from all responsibility for the defence of the Faith, nor may they wisely neglect all examination into the objections urged with so much ardour and ability against the beliefs which they hold. It is, of course, extremely unpalatable to the reverent and devoted spirit of a genuine Christian

to allow his mind to dwell on arguments and appeals which are inspired by a disbelief of, and sometimes an actual hostility towards, convictions and ideals, which are to himself the very stay of his soul; but there are two considerations which may induce him to overcome this legitimate repugnance, and compel him to face calmly the case of the adversary. On the one hand, Christian history certifies the facility and the frequency with which the cause of Christianity has been compromised by the honest ignorance and misguided zeal of its advocates. On the other hand, it cannot be doubted that there are many persons, whose repudiation of the Christian Faith arises far more from honest misconception than from any deliberate rejection of it; and with respect to all such persons it is the plain obligation of charity to remove, as far as we can, stumbling-blocks in the way of discipleship.

NOTES ON POPULAR RATIONALISM

In the following papers no attempt will be made to write a formal and complete apology for the Christian Religion. Few men possess the qualifications for such a task, and assuredly the present writer is not among the number. But a humbler object may not, perhaps, be altogether beyond attainment. Some of the more conspicuous, urgent, and weighty of current objections may be stated, and the answers which would suggest themselves as sufficient, if not also satisfactory, to the writer himself may be indicated. Something will have been gained if it is made clear that the Christian believer is not, in that character, necessarily committed to a depreciation of his own reason, or to a dread of scientific research, or to indifference towards the interests and hopes of civilized life ; that, in truth, to be a Christian is to possess the self-respect, which venerates reason, and the love of truth for its own sake which is

the temper of genuine science, and the self-surrendering habit which is the condition of social happiness.

II.

The Riddle of the Universe.

The Christian religion claims to provide a complete philosophy of life. It offers an account of the origin of the universe, a doctrine about man, a "working theory," as to the source and meaning of evil, a large and morally satisfying eschatology. The Christian, therefore, possesses in his faith the solution of "the Riddle of the Universe." But that solution claims his acceptance as being reasonable; and, on the same ground, it would have to be abandoned if another solution, more reasonable, were forthcoming. The questions suggested inevitably to human thought by experience and introspection demand answers; and hitherto Christianity has, within Christendom, satisfied that demand; *now* the traditional Christian answers are being heavily challenged

by the advocates of science. "Possession is nine points of the law" is an aphorism which has legitimate application within the intellectual sphere: and, in the present argument, it may be fairly applied in some such manner as this.

"You denounce my religion as unreasonable"—the Christian may rightly say to his antagonist—"and you call on me, in the name of reason, to surrender beliefs which have up to now satisfied both my conscience and my understanding: those beliefs are no private possession of my own, nor are they of recent origin, or limited acceptance. On the contrary, they are held by the majority of civilized Europeans, and have been so held for many generations. Moreover, they are fundamentally one with human convictions which might fairly be called universal. All this, of course, does not demonstrate their reasonableness, for error, not less than truth, may be both

ancient and universal, but it does create a presumption in their favour, and does constitute their rejection on my part a very serious proceeding, a proceeding, indeed, so serious that reason itself requires that my action should be deliberate and cautious. You must be able to show that your answers to the questions at issue are more reasonable, that is, more satisfying to my reason as explaining the facts which have to be reckoned with, than the answers of the Christian Creed, which, until you challenged them, seemed reasonable enough. I frankly acknowledge that nothing properly unreasonable has any real claim to my acceptance, and I readily admit that no halo of antiquity or plea of sentiment ought to be permitted to sustain in a self-respecting man's belief doctrines which his reason rejects. If, therefore, you can offer me an account of the universe, and especially of myself, which is

superior to that which I have in my Christian faith, I shall not hesitate to abandon the latter in favour of the former; but, until you can do this, you must on your part allow that, as a reasonable man, I cannot surrender my Christianity."

In the forefront of the Christian Creed is placed an assertion which forms the indispensable pre-supposition of all that follows, and which will serve us as an admirable example of the superior reasonableness (as we maintain) of Christianity over its "scientific" rival. "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth." This account of the origin of the Universe is categorically denied by the scientific materialists, of whom the well-known German savant, Ernst Haeckel, is the most conspicuous representative, and, though it would certainly be extremely misleading to offer Haeckel's theories

as representing the best scientific thought of our time,* yet those theories are very widely held among men of science, and very widely promulgated among our artisans. It is alleged that no less than 80,000 copies of the cheap edition of Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe" have already been sold in England alone. This great popularity is not undeserved. The book is well written and well arranged. The author has at command an immense accumulation of knowledge, and if, as cannot be fairly denied, his references to Christianity do not reveal any considerable acquaintance with its literature or history, yet it may fairly be pleaded that this implies no culpable

* Haeckel admits and tries to explain the highly suggestive fact that his theory as to the Nature of the Soul is rejected by the mature judgment of many eminent men of science. (*Vide* "Riddle of the Universe," pp. 36, 37; Rationalist Press Association's edition.)

negligence, and that, in truth, Christians are as little justified in expecting exact acquaintance with theology from the specialists of physical science as are the latter in expecting exact scientific information from the professors of religion. All that can be reasonably demanded in either case is sufficient grasp of the points at issue, an honest construction of arguments on both sides, and a total abstinence from personal discourtesy. Happily, the fundamental issues stand out with great clearness, and are capable of being intelligibly discussed without much technical knowledge, whether of physical science or of theology. We take then Haeckel's denial of the first Article of the Creed, and subject it to the method of consideration which we have laid down as reasonable.

The belief that the Universe (and therein, man himself) has its ultimate origin in the creative Will of a Personal

God has long commended itself to men as offering the most reasonable explanation within their reach of the Universe and especially of their own nature. Again and again that belief has been challenged both from the side of philosophy and from the side of science; and a vast apologetic literature has been called into existence by the necessity of answering this reiterated challenge. The apologists have always maintained, both against the philosopher and against the men of science, that reason is on the side of Christianity, that, though there are difficulties in the way of a perfectly satisfactory answer to the obstinate questionings of existence, yet the Christian's Creed is the most satisfactory theory known to mankind, and does more successfully than any rival hold together the truth of the unity of Nature, which is the irreducible demand of philosophy and science, and the truth of the essential

spirituality of man himself, which is the irreducible demand of his own self-respect. It has never been denied that the attribute of "personality" to God is beset with considerable difficulty, and lends itself to grave misconceptions; but it has been none the less unswervingly held that, when due allowance has been made for the necessary imperfection of human language as used to describe the truth about God, when it has been frankly admitted that, in the Apostle's phrase, "here we see in a glass darkly," that our knowledge is partial and relative, and our religious language provisional and contingent, no more helpful and suggestive account of the Source of All Being can be given than that which clothes Him with personality. "The monistic idea of God, which alone is compatible with our present knowledge of Nature," says Haeckel, "recognises the divine spirit in all things. It can

never recognise in God a ' personal being,' or, *in other words, an individual of limited extension in space, or even of human form.*"* Christians are entitled to demur to this paraphrase of their belief. Divine personality certainly does not mean what is here alleged. Even the dogmatic confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries might suffice to correct so crude a notion. Take the first of the Anglican Articles as an instance. " There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions ; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, both visible and invisible." It is not for one moment denied that there are difficulties attaching to the Christian belief in God as " personal," but, after reflection and examination renewed

* " The Confession of Faith of a Man of Science." London, 1903.

incessantly, we Christians can find no more satisfactory formula by which to describe the Author of our being. We maintain that to Him we cannot reasonably ascribe a lower kind of existence than that which we ourselves possess *ex hypothesi* by derivation from Him. To our thinking "personality" stands for the highest category of existence, but in conceiving of the Creator's existence as "personal" we do not, of course, carry over without correction into our creed a notion which, in its application to ourselves, has certain obviously unsuitable connections. Limitation is of the essence of human personality; the absence of limitation might almost as truly be said to be of the essence of Divine personality; but consciousness and volition are ultimate terms of thought, which represent to us the very beings we know ourselves to be; and we cannot but assume in the Author of our

nature the counterpart of these. The content of human consciousness and the range and purpose of human volition become therefore necessarily ministerial to the development of Theistic belief. Man cannot but seek in the Source of his being the springs of his own intelligence, emotion, conscience, and, in a word, trace in himself the tokens of his ancestry, and, so doing, he is brought to the conception of a "Personal" God.

The Christian Theist inevitably carries his creed beyond himself. Will the theory of a "Personal" God, Creator of the Universe, fit in with the evident testimonies of the Universe as to its own constitution? Here again, there has never been absent the recognition of difficulty: Nature yields a doubtful message at best. If, in times of spiritual exaltation, the religious student has been moved to cry with the Psalmist, "The heavens

declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork," it has never been less true that at other times, in front of other aspects of the natural world, faith has failed before the overwhelming demonstrations of non-moral force. Still, in the main, the apologists of Christianity have rested their case here also on the reasonableness of the view that this Universe, when carefully considered, is best explained by the Theist's creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth." The order and beauty of Nature have been thought inconsistent with a purely mechanical theory of origins. They have seemed more reasonably explicable as the effect of Divine intelligence and benevolence; and, though the argument from design no longer takes a prominent place in the scheme of Christian apologists, yet it is by no means discarded, nor, indeed, can

it be so without consequences fatal to the Theistic hypothesis.

Since, therefore, we have received this explanation of the Universe and therein of ourselves on grounds of intrinsic reasonableness, we cannot reasonably abandon it unless those grounds can be shown to be untenable, and another explanation intrinsically more reasonable can be offered us. What then, in plain words, is the new explanation which Haeckel has to offer us as superior to the old creed ?

He begins by postulating the existence of " a primal substance," which, according to a universal " law " of evolution, has brought everything that is into being. " As this fundamental cosmic law (he says) establishes the eternal persistence of matter and force, their unvarying constancy throughout the entire universe, it has become the pole-star that guides our Monistic Philosophy through the

mighty labyrinth to a solution of the world problem."* We are told further that "the recognition that such a law dominates the entire Universe, and that the world is nothing else than an eternal 'evolution of substance,' is a fruit of the Nineteenth century." Thus he excludes a "Personal" Creator at the beginning of the Universe, and the possibility of Divine Providence in the course of its history. The whole process of evolution from start to finish is mechanical. The proof of this theory is offered in some detail, and consists in a series of scientific demonstrations converging to one central proof that everything we know is explicable as the product of natural evolution. The Christian properly insists with special emphasis on the congruity of his creed

* "The Riddle of the Universe," p. 2. I quote from the sixpenny edition, issued by the Rationalist Press Association.

with the suggestions of human nature itself, and he is accordingly more than ever curious to know how Haeckel will explain, or explain away, those suggestions. He is not much impressed by the physical similarity between man and the other animals, for that similarity has always been too obvious to escape notice, nor is he conscious of any essential divergence from his creed when he hears that "our embryonic development" is exactly parallel to that of other mammals, but he receives a rude shock when the calm and interesting scientific argument suddenly takes a leap into the region of speculation, and boldly challenges the very bases of religion. The following parargaph must be quoted in full: "The most important moment in the life of every man, as in that of all other complex animals, is the moment in which he begins his individual existence; it is the moment when the sexual

cells of both parents meet and coalesce for the formation of a single cell. This new cell, the impregnated egg-cell, is the individual stem-cell (the cystula) the continued segmentation of which produces the cells of the germinal layers and the gastrula. With the formation of this cystula, hence in the process of conception itself, the existence of the personality, the independent individual, commences." So far the Christian (though he may dislike the language) has no necessary quarrel with the statement, but the case is far otherwise with the inferences drawn from it, not without some violence. "This ontogenetic fact," continues Haeckel, "is supremely important, for the most far-reaching conclusions may be drawn from it. In the first place, we have a clear perception that man, like all the other complex animals, inherits all his personal characteristics, bodily and mental, from his

parents : and, further, we come to this momentous conclusion that the new personality which arises thus can lay no claim to 'immortality.' "* As a mere matter of logic, I fail to see why the prohibition of immortality follows from the fact that man comes into the world by one mode rather than another. The conclusion has no proper connection with the premisses. Christians have never connected the hope of immortality with any denial of the unquestioned fact that men are conceived and born : nor does it matter in the least to the Christian Creed whether the whole endowment of human nature is conveyed in the physical process of conception, or by some separate creative act. The Christian Creed is quite consistent with either hypothesis, and has this additional advantage that it explains satisfactorily

* *Ibid*, pp. 22, 23.

the general and powerful disposition of men to believe in their own immortality. That disposition, or instinct, is rather explained away than explained by the advocates of Haeckel's "monistic" theory. But, we must ask, does the view that heredity entirely accounts for every human life satisfactorily explain the facts? Take the familiar fact, I might almost as fitly say, the constantly recurrent miracle, of genius. From the unlikeliest parents there suddenly emerges on to the arena of human life a Plato, an Aristotle, a Dante, a Shakespeare. What is the most reasonable explanation of their amazing genius, which has nothing behind it which we can point to as its source, and which passes on nothing by natural succession to others? Haeckel's theory implies the denial that such genius is extraordinary: we are to see in it the normal product of a natural process, and explain, as best we

may, its sudden appearance and its curious inability to transmit anything to its natural heirs. The Christian theory recognises in genius a special inspiration of the Creator-Spirit, from Which man draws his origin.

Indeed, the more closely the course of human history is studied, the more inadequate appears to be the explanation offered by a rigid doctrine of physical evolution. The amazing influence of personality defies a mechanical theory of human nature, while it corresponds exactly to the requirements of theTheistic creed. For when, in the primal substance, which we are required to postulate, we have to store the whole content of the Universe, and to find the aboriginal source of human nature itself, we are reduced to an obvious dilemma. Unless we thus clothe with infinite potencies that impersonal matter, from which has been evolved so much, we

cannot find any sufficient explanation of the facts, and the Riddle of the Universe remains as far from solution as ever: but, if we do this, we cannot reasonably object to the plea that though we avoid the name, we have conceded the doctrine of Theism. Or, to state the argument in a different way: If, as is manifestly the case, we must find in a primal substance the ultimate source of all the phenomena—physical, intellectual, moral—which constitute the Universe we know, is it unreasonable to insist that such a substance is itself unthinkable save as the product of a still nobler Power, which we cannot conceive or describe save in the terms of "personality." Is Haeckel's postulate of "substance" more reasonable than the Christian postulate of "God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth?" I freely confess for myself that on this truly fundamental issue the superior

reasonableness seems to me to belong to the Christian Creed. I can see that the explanation offered by the Creed is at least reasonably adequate: the explanation offered by Haeckel seems to me properly no explanation at all. It is precisely on all fours with the Oriental notion of the tortoise which supports the world: we cannot but ask on what the tortoise itself is standing. This primal substance, which potentially is the Universe, cannot be taken for granted: it can find no justification for itself in the evidences of design in Nature, which inevitably suggest intelligence, or in those lofty human aspirations which insistently witness to a "Personal" God: it stands unexplained and remains unsatisfying. We cannot but ask from whence it draws its origin.

Haeckel's interesting and powerful volume, therefore, appears to the present writer, so far as Religion is concerned

with its argument, to be an elaborate example of that subtle, ancient, and common logical fallacy known as *ignoratio elenchi*, or, in plain English, "missing the point." Evolution can never answer the fundamental question as to the origin of the Universe; it can go far to answer the secondary question by what method the Universe has come to be what it is. To say that "the world is nothing else than an eternal 'evolution of substance'" is to confuse together two essentially distinct notions. The world may be subject to an evolution, it cannot be an evolution: just as a child may be subject to growth, it cannot be growth. You do not reasonably explain the world by proving to me that it takes shape by a process of evolution; you leave me still ignorant of its origin, and if, unable to remain contented with that ignorance, I examine for myself this assertion of the Christian Creed,

which meets me when I in turn emerge for a moment on to the plane of history, and which brings as its credentials a vast array of deliberate human acceptances, and if I also decide that in the ancient conviction of humanity must be found the solution of the Riddle of the Universe—if I also recognise in the evolution of substance the gradual unfolding of a Divine Purpose, and confess in the mysterious greatness of human nature the authentic traces of a Divine Original, by what authority of reason can my faith be rebuked, or disallowed? By what authority of reason is my conviction that the source of all phenomena is the Will of a "Personal" God, represented as implying a contradiction of that "science" which perforce begins its account of the Universe with a confession of ignorance as to its origin?

III.

Evolution of the Idea of God.

The more I read of anti-Christian literature, the more evident it appears to me that the confusion of mind to which I have already adverted with respect to evolution lies at the root of much unbelief. An example to my hand is provided by another publication of the Rationalist Press Association, a very interesting book, Mr. Grant Allen's "Evolution of the Idea of God." I am not concerned here with the particular theory as to the origin of religion, which the author advocates with characteristic ardour. Every one knows that Mr. Grant Allen's theories do not command the general acceptance of the students of comparative religion; but the main suggestion of his book is independent of the value of any particular theory, and, no doubt, it is this and nothing else

which makes the book serviceable in the anti-religious propaganda of the Rationalist Press Association. He gives us an account of what he conceives to be the process by which the human race has become religious; but he, as little as Haeckel, faces the really vital questions, with which alone the Christian as such is concerned, namely, the questions of the origin and tendency of the process. That mankind has reached the pure, ethical theism of the Christian Creed by a long movement out of the strangest and most grotesque ignorance, in which the conception of God reflected with curious fidelity the intellectual and moral standards of the time, is no new doctrine, and certainly by no means necessarily contradicts the Christian Faith. That there has been a steadily upward process, coeval with the human race, and faithfully registering its development accords well enough with the Christian

conception of Christ's mission to the world as constituting the climax of a long and progressive education, in which the human agents have been the sages and prophets of all nations, to whom the Divine Spirit has entrusted His teachings. Of course, the writers of the Bible did not use the language of modern anthropological science, nor would they have understood or sympathized with the students of comparative religion: they thought and spoke (as men must always think and speak) under the limiting conditions of their earthly lot. But when we get home to the truth which they are uttering in their respective fashions, we find that they had got hold of a doctrine of evolution, with this feature in addition, which certainly gives precisely that reasonable basis to the doctrine which its modern exponents are not able to provide, that they traced the origin of the process to the will of a personal God. It

would be by no means an unsatisfactory description of the Bible to adopt the title of Mr. Grant Allen's book, though it certainly would not be adequate. The Bible gives us "the evolution of the idea of God," and we are freed from the uncomfortable necessity (as unsatisfying as it is plainly unreasonable) of postulating so little at the start, when we must admit so much at the finish, by the great assumption of faith with which the Bible opens—"*In the beginning God.*" We have much to learn about the actual course of that long spiritual education of which we have in history only the last and briefest chapter, and unquestionably the science of comparative religion is quickly revolutionizing Christian thought on that subject: but, while I find myself continually revising my notions on this secondary matter, I fail as yet to see any kind of reasonable necessity laid upon me to deny the fundamental postulate of

my Christian creed. It seems to me that, although, of necessity, I now must read into the words a wealth of meanings which the sacred writer then would neither have understood nor allowed, yet it would be impossible to find a truer and more adequate description of the facts which modern science discloses, than that which he offers as containing the explanation of his own Christian belief. "*God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets, by divers portions and in divers manner, hath in these days spoken unto us by His Son.*"* The whole religious suggestion of Mr. Grant Allen's book, as of Haeckel's, is essentially contained in the proposition that Christianity is as truly the product of natural forces as any other phenomena: all alike come to be what they are by virtue of the same natural process.

* Hebrews i. 1.

We are called upon as Christians to drop our accustomed supernatural claim on behalf of our religion, and to place it frankly on the natural plane. Now, at first sight, this demand seems to imply nothing less than the total negation of religion in any intelligible sense ; but, if we examine more closely what is asked of us, we shall find no difficulty, I think, in perceiving that our first impression was mistaken. The proposition, "religion is natural to man," is more properly an assertion that man is essentially religious than an assertion that religion is essentially undivine. It is, indeed, fundamental to the Christian theology that religion *is* natural to man ; and, if it be the case that Christian teachers are accustomed to describe the religion of Christ as truly supernatural, we have to remember that there are two considerations which necessarily colour their thought and determine their language.

On the one hand, they hold that the religious development of man has been no unhampered process, and that human nature as it actually exists is, so to say, an inadequate version of itself. Thus they commonly use the term "natural" in a derogatory sense. The doctrine of the Fall has often been defined absurdly and pressed unreasonably, but there are few, if any, thoughtful students of human history who will deny that it expresses a fact which everywhere meets them in the course of their inquiries, and which cannot be ignored without extreme unreasonableness. The evolution of mankind has included degeneration as well as progress: at every turn the advance of the race has been strangely hindered, diverted, and, in certain directions, apparently stopped; and if, in spite of this, Theists and Evolutionists are agreed in maintaining that, on a broad view of the whole area of history,

it is reasonable to maintain that progress has been the prevailing character of the development, still, the factors which make for retrogression cannot reasonably be ignored or belittled: and it is precisely in these that the Christian theologian finds confirmation in experience, and therefore also in reason, of his traditional doctrine of the Fall. Tennyson's familiar couplet is equally true as the verdict of science and as the doctrine of religion—

> Forward then, but still remember how the course of Time will swerve,
> Crook and turn upon itself in many a backward streaming curve.

On the other hand, Christian teachers do not regard the *supernatural* as in any measure disallowing or contradicting the *natural*, but rather as confirming, interpreting and completing it. The appeal of the Christian missionary remains to-day what it was

in the days of Tertullian, an appeal to the human spirit, as *naturally** Christian. Christianity, in fact, builds and has always built on the foundation of this natural Christianity of mankind, and it claims and has always claimed to lead on that natural human Christianity to its true climax. Therefore, when the students of anthropological science bid us recognise the *naturalness* of our religion, we must demur to the inadequacy of their presentation of the facts, and we may fairly insist on some explanations, but we do not find in it any proper, still less any fatal disagreement with our own belief.

But, of course, it may be objected that religion is on its way to die ; that, on the present lines of human development

* Apology 17. " O testimonium animæ naturaliter Christianæ." Tertullian has wrapped up his great thought in characteristically whimsical fashion, but nothing can diminish its abiding value.

it may reasonably be expected that the human race will, in a longer or shorter time, discard altogether its religious beliefs, and content itself with such a theory of its own origin, nature, and destiny as that which agnostic, or even atheistic, science can offer. In this event, undoubtedly, the whole force of the present argument could be turned against Christianity. Religion would have been shown to have been but a passing phase of human experience, and, whatever inferences might have been at any time drawn from it as to the quality and probable future of mankind would be disallowed by the latest and most authoritative confessions of human experience. This, of course, is what Mr. Grant Allen thinks will actually happen. "Thus," he says, in concluding his chapter on "Survivals in Christendom," "the Cult of the Dead, which is the earliest origin of all religion, in the

sense of worship, is also the last relic of the religious spirit which survives the decay of faith due to modern scepticism. To this cause I refer on the whole the spiritualistic utterances of so many among our leaders of modern science. They have rejected religion, but they cannot reject the inherited and ingrained religious emotions."*

Admitting, then, that if the human race at its highest point of development should come to repudiate all religion, we should have to abandon the belief that religion was properly natural to man, and to surrender the inference from that belief, viz., that man can only then be reasonably explained when the explanation takes account of and justifies his religious instincts and hopes, we are in an impregnable position so long as we can reasonably maintain that this con-

* "The Evolution of the Idea of God," p. 155.

tingency is yet remote, that its probability is extremely questionable, and that, on the confession of our opponents, the signs of our times are unfavourable to them. We may refer again to our quotation from Mr. Grant Allen as evidence in our favour. His explanation of the religiousness of many leaders of modern science is less important than his admission of the fact. When he tells us that "they cannot reject the inherited and ingrained religious emotions," and implies not obscurely that they ought to do so if they were loyal to their own scientific principles, we cannot fairly be prevented from offering our own explanation of their conduct. We may think that their very devotion to science holds them back from so unscientific a procedure as would be implied in the neglect and even contradiction of factors in human nature, which, although along the lines of specific scientific investigations

they cannot yet be accounted for, are none the less so important, so invariable, and so imperious that they cannot reasonably be excluded from a complete account of the nature of man. We may support ourselves in this view of the case with the recent opinion of that distinguished and outspoken man of science, Professor Ray Lankester, whom no one will accuse of spiritualistic utterances. "So far as I," he says, "have been able to ascertain, after many years in which these matters have engaged my attention, there is no relation, in the sense of a connection or influence, between science and religion. There is, it is true, often an antagonistic relation between exponents of science and exponents of religion when the latter illegitimately misrepresent or deny the conclusions of scientific research or try to prevent its being carried on, or, again, when the former presume, by magnifying

the extremely limited conclusions of science, to deal in a destructive spirit with the very existence of these beliefs and hopes which are called 'religion.' Setting aside such excusable and purely personal collisions between rival claimants for authority and power, it appears to me that science proceeds on its path without any contact with religion, and that religion has not, in its essential qualities, anything to hope for, or to fear from, science. The whole order of nature, including living and lifeless matter—man, animal, and gas—is a network of mechanism the main features and many details of which have been made more or less obvious to the wondering intelligence of mankind by the labour and ingenuity of scientific investigators. *But no sane man has ever pretended, since science became a definite body of doctrine, that we know or ever can hope to know or conceive of the possibility of knowing,*

whence this mechanism has come, why it is there, whither it is going, and what there may or may not be beyond and beside it which our senses are incapable of appreciating. These things are not 'explained' by science, and never can be."* This is a frank statement of scientific helplessness to dispense with religion when the question of reasonably explaining MAN is raised.

That original and suggestive writer, Professor William James, concludes his "Varieties of Religious Experience" with a remarkable chapter, which may well give pause to the enthusiastic disciples of the Rationalism which makes its boast of "science," and never tires of heaping scorn on religion. He protests against the materialistic habit of "the so-called scientist," and cries a warning

* *Times*, Tuesday, May 19, 1903. The italics in this and other quotations are mine.

against a tendency which is inevitably bound up with such studies as those which Mr. Grant Allen has pursued.

"The cultivator of the science of religions," he says, "has to become acquainted with so many grovelling and horrible superstitions that a presumption easily arises in his mind that any belief that is religious probably is false . . . the consequence is that the conclusions of the science of religions are as likely to be adverse as they are to be favourable to the claim that the essence of religion is true. There is a notion in the air about us that religion is probably only an anachronism, a case of 'survival,' an atavistic relapse into a mode of thought which humanity in its more enlightened examples has outgrown ; and this notion our religious anthropologists at present do little to counteract." This, we may allow, is a fair account of Mr. Grant Allen's book, which we have made

the text of this paper. Professor James goes on to discuss the scientific attitude which he condemns. He allows an element of truth in the "survival theory" of religion, "for religion does in fact perpetuate the traditions of the most primeval thought," but then he holds that, in spite of all kinds of extravagance, those traditions enshrined the truth. Science in denying religion is ignoring important elements of human nature, which are none the less present and powerful because they are ignored. "To describe the world," he says brusquely, "with all the various feelings of the individual pinch of destiny, all the various spiritual attitudes, left out from the description—they being as describable as anything else—would be something like offering a printed bill of fare as the equivalent for a solid meal. Religion makes no such blunder. The individual's religion may be egotistic, and

those private realities which it keeps in touch with may be narrow enough ; but at any rate it always remains infinitely less hollow and abstract, as far as it goes, than a science which prides itself on taking no account of anything private at all. . . . The contention of the survival theory that we ought to stick to non-personal elements exclusively seems like saying that we ought to be satisfied for ever with reading the naked bill of fare. I think, therefore, that however particular questions connected with our individual destinies may be answered, it is only by acknowledging them as genuine questions, and living in the sphere of thought which they open up, that we become profound. But to live thus is to be religious ; so *I unhesitatingly repudiate the survival theory of religion, as being founded on an egregious mistake.* It does not follow, because our ancestors made so many errors of fact and mixed

them with their religion, that we should therefore leave off being religious at all. By being religious we establish ourselves in possession of ultimate reality at the only points at which reality is given us to guard. Our responsible concern is with our private destiny, after all."

All this seems to me thoroughly reasonable, and I am less than ever disposed to be hustled out of my religion by the "science" of the rationalists. Professor James is by no means disposed to accept a gloomy view of the future of religion. He even thinks we may all come back to believe much that we have now very generally discarded.

"The final human opinion may, in short, in some manner now impossible to foresee, revert to the more personal style, just as any path of progress may follow a spiral rather than a straight line. If this were so, the rigorously impersonal view of science might one day

appear as having been a *temporarily useful eccentricity rather than the definitively triumphant position which the sectarian scientist at present so confidently announces it to be.*" This is turning the tables on the rationalists in good earnest, and I make no further comment on it than the single observation that Professor James has certainly as much right to speak in the name of science as Mr. Grant Allen. Personally I think he has reason on his side when he invites us to agree "that Religion, occupying herself with personal destinies and keeping thus in contact with the only absolute realities which we know, must necessarily play an eternal part in human history." I think Sir Oliver Lodge is the spokesman of reason when he says, with reference to the phenomena of instinct and genius, that "these things are beyond science of the orthodox type," and exhorts science "to be silent and deny nothing

in the universe till it has at least made an honest effort to grasp the whole."* I think he speaks what is plainly the case when he says, "The region of religion and the region of a completer science are one." Science and religion are by no means so universally divorced as the publications of the Rationalist Press Association habitually take for granted. "Forty years ago," wrote Lord Kelvin recently, "I asked Liebig, walking somewhere in the country, if he believed that the grass and flowers which we saw around us grew by mere chemical forces. He answered, 'No, no more than I could believe that a book of botany describing them could grow by mere chemical forces.'"†

I have already compared the warfare of modern science against religion to a

* *Hibbert Journal* for Jan. 1903: "The Reconciliation between Science and Faith."

† *Times*, May 4, 1903.

crusade. Here I may borrow from the Father of Modern Science a parallel between the superstition which is the parasite of religion, and a kindred temper which is the parasite of science. Just as superstition refuses to take account of any facts save only those which support its favourite beliefs, so, according to Lord Bacon,* within the scientific sphere the same spirit may be recognised by the same signs. "But with far more subtlety does this mischief insinuate itself into philosophy and the sciences: in which the first conclusion colours and brings into conformity with itself all that come after, though far sounder and better." "The human understanding," he writes, "is no dry light, but receives an infusion

* The "Novum Organon," xlvi. and xlix. I have availed myself of Mr Spedding's admirable translation: Works of Francis Bacon, vol. iv. pp. 56, 57.

from the will and affections: whence proceed sciences which may be called 'sciences as one would.' For what a man had rather were true he more readily believes. Therefore he rejects difficult things from impatience of research; sober things, because they narrow hope; the deeper things of nature, from superstition; the light of experience, from arrogance and pride, lest his mind should seem to be occupied with things mean and transitory: things not commonly believed, out of deference to the opinion of the vulgar. Numberless in short are the ways, and sometimes imperceptible, in which the affections colour and infect the understanding." In the seventeenth century, when the "Novum Organon" appeared, it was the advocates of religion who most needed the great philosopher's warning against the "Idols of the Tribe": in the twentieth century it would seem to be rather the advocates

of science whom his grave warnings most affect.

Be this as it may, I am quite clear that there is no ground in *reason* for my being ashamed of religion. The arrogant rationalism which derides Christianity as a mere survival, destined to perish altogether before the advance of science, is not authorized by the masters of science. No doubt it would be unfair and unwarrantable to read into such declarations as those we have quoted from Lord Kelvin, and Professor Ray Lankester, and Professor William James, and the greatest of all, Lord Bacon, anything more than the decisive repudiation of materialism, which undoubtedly they contain, but so much cannot be disputed, and at this stage of our argument we need no more. There is no *unreasonableness* in the grand postulate of religion, and nothing in the evolution of the idea of God to throw discredit on the

incorrigible human religiousness which that evolution manifests. Physical science, anthropology, the science of comparative religion—one and all may bring their distinctive contributions of knowledge to us, and we may frankly accept them all, and find in our acquisition only a deepened solemnity of conviction as we repeat the old great creed which we received from our fathers—"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth."

IV.

Man's Place in the Universe.

THERE is yet one more preliminary objection with which we must concern ourselves. I may call it a difficulty in the way of the Christian Faith which arises, not so much from the religion itself, as from a disturbance of the imagination, caused by the altered proportions in which all human affairs are now seen. Rationalistic science speaks with two voices. The one is the voice of an exaggerated modesty,* the other that of

* *Cf.* Haeckel, "Riddle of the Universe," p. 6. (R. P. Ed.)

"It (*i.e.*, the 'magnificent cosmological perspective' which science discloses) not only clearly indicates the true place of man in nature, but it dissipates the prevalent illusion of man's supreme mportance, and the arrogance with which he sets himself apart from the illimitable universe, and exalts himself to the position of its most valuable element."

an exaggerated pride.* Thus while, on the one hand, we are confidently assured that no mystery of existence will ultimately be found to be beyond the scope of the human intellect, we are, on the other hand, continually warned against the excessive and irrational conceit which is implied in the Christian hypothesis. It is with the latter contention that in this paper we are concerned. Of course it cannot be denied that the disturbance of the imagination is a very serious fact.

* Mr. William Watson, in "The Dream of Man," has effectively rebuked the inordinate vanity of scientific man, who in the conceit of his knowledge denies the existence of any superior to himself, asking:

"In what room of the palace of Nature
Resides the invisible God?
For all her doors I have opened,
And all her floors I have trod.
If greater than I be her tenant,
Let him answer my challenging call:
Till then I admit no rival,
But crown myself master of all."

The old simple scheme of the Universe which made our earth the centre of everything, and the old notion of the world's history which made man obviously the central factor in time, seem to be at every point disallowed by modern science. Time has been immensely extended ; the periods which the geologists and the biologists contemplate are of unimaginable duration, and even when we come to recorded history, we find that, although of course on a vastly smaller scale, the same process has continued until the period with which the historian must reckon has to be extended far indeed beyond good Archbishop Usher's 4004 B.C. with which we are all familiar in our English Bibles. So also with regard to space, our ancestors contemplated a bijou edition of the Universe, in which the earth was manifestly and beyond all question the vastest thing they knew, and had an unquestionable

title to the supreme position which Christianity conferred upon it ; but now astronomers speak of worlds immensely greater in bulk than our own, and distant so far from us, that the light which left them 400 years ago * is only now coming within the limit of our vision. Whatever branch of science we take up we are encountered by a similar enlargement of view. The microscope, in the opposite direction, dismays us with its revelations hardly less than the telescope, and everything converges to one result—a kind of involuntary and irrepressible disgust with the assumption of Christianity that this world has been the scene of the direct personal manifestation of the Creator of

* *Vide* Wallace, " Man's Place in the Universe," pp. 94-95. Professor S. Newcomb is quoted as authority for the estimate that the light from Canopus, the brightest star in the southern hemisphere, would take almost exactly 400 years to reach us.

the Universe, and that man holds a princedom by title of the Incarnation which elevates him above all things visible and invisible.* Two observations occur at once. In the first place, the enlargement of the Universe is itself some measure of the corresponding enlargement of the human faculties which have perceived and in some sense measured and interpreted it, so that it becomes a question whether the enhanced greatness of man is not an even more impressive phenomenon than the enhanced bulk and lengthened antiquity of the Universe. In the next place, it is a fair retort to rationalistic men of science, that they cannot have their argument both ways.

* An effective summary of the effect of modern science on the imagination is provided by Mr. S. Laing's "Modern Science and Modern Thought" (No. 3 of the R.P.A. cheap reprints). See especially the chapters on "Antiquity of Man" and "Man's Place in Nature."

If human faculties are competent to do all that they ascribe to them, then at least Christians must be set free from the embarrassment of man's relative insignificance, which in other connections they are wont to press as an objection to Christianity. If, however, the latter point is to be insisted upon, and the relative insignificance of man is to be accepted as requiring an abandonment of a religion which assumes his primacy in the world of phenomena, then it would seem to be plainly irrational to attribute to the human pigmy the immense competence which the rationalistic hypothesis assumes. Be this as it may, we are far from denying that the difficulty is a very grave one, and if, none the less, we insist that it cannot be allowed to prevail against other and still more cogent considerations, we hold ourselves bound to confess that its gravity is very great.

It must be observed that, though the difficulty presents itself to the modern mind under new forms, still it is a difficulty which never has been altogether absent from the mind of religious thinkers. The physical insignificance of man is perhaps most of all evident to the undeveloped intellect of the savage, exposed as he is to all the perils of nature without the multitudinous protective devices with which civilization equips him. He cannot fail to realize how pitiably weak he is. The author of the eighth Psalm utters, in a religious way, the despondent consciousness of human insignificance in front of nature : " When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him and the Son of man that Thou visitest him ? "

Indeed it is no mean argument against the anti-religious inference which ration-

alists draw from the relative pettiness of man and his planet, that those primitive thinkers, who were the first religious teachers of mankind, should have been able, in the face of the overwhelming facts of existence, to construct their religious theories and build up the fabric of faith.

In truth the paradox loses nothing of its old significance and gains nothing of new significance by the constant enlargement of its scale. The antithesis was at the first and remains at the last one between two kinds of power, not between two measurements of one kind of power. Granting to the full that the physical insignificance of this planet and its inhabitants is as great as the advocates of rationalistic science care to say, and disdaining to draw to the help of religion precarious scientific speculations such as those set forward, with his usual ability, by Dr. Alfred Wallace in his book, "Man's

Place in the Universe," we rest our case on what we conceive to be the impregnable position of the intrinsic superiority of moral over physical life.

Christianity throughout its course has been continually enlarging its conceptions of its own influence and destiny, and it would only be what all previous experience justifies us in expecting, if the Christianity of the future should have to realize, as it has never realized yet, that the revelation of God in Christ had a far-reaching influence beyond the race of man and its world. It seems to be properly implied in the notion of a Divine incarnation that its effect should embrace the whole Universe, and when once this conviction is rooted in the mind, the difficulties suggested to faith by the comparative unimportance of the earth and of the race of man lose most of their relevance. The question at issue becomes now, if we may adopt this manner of

speaking, not a primary but a secondary question. The primary question is disallowed, for, however vast the Universe may be, it is of the essence of the Christian hypothesis that the whole of it should be embraced within the action of the Incarnate Creator. The secondary question is one of method. Unquestionably it is extremely unlike, what on *a priori* grounds we should have expected, that one of the most insignificant of planets should have been chosen as the scene of events which have critical importance for the entire Universe. But, then, there are two considerations which mitigate this improbability. On the one hand, we are faced by precisely the difficulty which inheres in the whole method of the Incarnation. On *a priori* grounds it must be ever amazing to the Christian believer that the Almighty Creator should have selected mankind to be the instrument of His supreme self-revelation.

From the first, indeed, the note of astonishment is habitual in Christian literature. The Incarnation is always presented as an amazing mystery of Divine condescension, a supreme example of voluntary Divine self-limitation. A single example will suffice. One of the earliest utterances of Christian faith is that of St. Paul in the famous Christological passage in the Epistle to the Philippians, and there it is the marvellous humility of God which arrests the wonder of the Apostle :

" Have this mind in you," * he writes to his converts, designing to check their self-sufficiency by the most amazing example of self-suppression he knew, " which was also in Christ Jesus ; who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of

* Philippians ii. 5-11.

men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross." And having thus stated so strongly the voluntary humiliation of God (if we may so speak) implied in the Incarnation, St. Paul proceeds to state the other side of the paradox by extending the range of Christ's influence to the utmost limits of existence. "Wherefore also," he continues, "God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

St. Paul, of course, describes the Universe after the fashion of his time, and his description may move the mirth of an instructed modern man of science, but there can be no question that the

Apostle's argument fits the facts disclosed by modern science quite as well as it fitted the facts within his own knowledge.

On the other hand, human experience suggests many examples of the same kind of paradox as that which, on a vast scale, is presented by Christianity. Mere size is, in common reckoning, no satisfactory measure, either of worth or of importance. Examples occur to the mind with such profusion that it is hard to make a selection. But whether we select for illustration the world of organic life, or of history, or of politics, or indeed of any sphere of human endeavour, we shall find examples of the same paradox. Thus, two of the least numerous and least powerful of all the nations of mankind, the Greeks and the Jews, have been, as all the world confesses, the most permanently and beneficially influential.

This is precisely a parallel to the unique

importance ascribed by the Christian hypothesis to our planet. Again, almost any period of great intellectual distinction and literary achievement will present the same astonishing discrepancy between the most considerable works effected and the insignificance of the workers. Take the most famous period of all—the Golden Age of Antiquity. Of all productions of that wonderful period, who could have guessed that those which succeeding ages would come to acknowledge as the most precious and potent would be a small collection of documents, of which the chief were anonymous, having their origin and first circulation among an obscure and mostly unlettered sect? The fact is as certain as its astonishing character is evident; and again, this is the same paradox as that which is pressed on us with such inexorable persistence by rationalistic men of science.

Examples of this kind might be indefinitely multiplied, but there is no need to multiply them. The inference to which they point is the *a priori* probability of that very fundamental paradox which disturbs the imagination, and operates so commonly as an argument against the Christian hypothesis, or at least it points to the absence of any *a priori* unreasonableness on this account in the Christian hypothesis. We have said already that the antithesis is properly one between two kinds of power, and not one between two measurements of one kind of power. We must add, as bearing on this point, that science provides no evidence whatever as yet that throughout the ever-expanding Universe there is any other kind of physical law prevailing than that which obtains within the limited scope of this planet. We have simply the fact of an enlargement of the area over which known laws are operating.

Throughout the vast spaces which astronomical science brings within the range of our knowledge, and equally throughout the almost unimaginable tracts of time which the geologist is habitually assuming in his argument, it appears that precisely those laws prevail with which the chemist is familiar in his laboratory when at work in the humblest of his experiments. It follows, therefore, that nothing new is really brought by science into the question with which as Christians we are concerned, but only the old question shown on an immensely greater scale. Moreover, as far as we know, there is no sign anywhere in the Universe that moral life as we recognise it in ourselves and in human history exists elsewhere than on this planet; and if, therefore, our fundamental assumption of the intrinsic superiority of the moral life over the physical be sound, there is not only nothing advanced by science which

properly contradicts the incorrigibly geocentric thought of Christianity, but rather the testimony of science to the apparent absence of the highest kind of life from every part of the Universe save ours, seems actually to require that a true religion should, in a very high degree, be geocentric. We do not mean to say that the legitimacy of the Christian hypothesis is in any way contingent upon the inability of science to discover somewhere else in the Universe new examples of moral life. But we do say that, as the evidence stands now, we are under no reasonable necessity to contemplate a situation which has not yet occurred. No doubt, if necessity arose, there are many theories which would suggest themselves to Christian thinkers, and which might even justify themselves to impartial reason, which would be able to correlate with the Christian doctrine the fact of the existence of moral beings and

morally constituted societies in other planets than our own. Indeed it is sufficiently well known that there is a considerable amount of more or less intelligent speculation among Christian folk as to the probability of that fact. We are not required here to pass any judgment on such speculation. We have said enough for our purpose if we have made it clear that, at the point where scientific thought now stands, there is nothing in the comparatively dwarfed position of the earth in the hierarchy of worlds, certified unquestionably by modern science, which should dispose us to resent what I have called the incorrigibly geocentric character of the Christian religion. I admit that, at first sight, there is an apparent incongruity between so petty a scene and such vastly significant events. I concede a legitimate and indeed inevitable disturbance of the imagination, but I cannot concede that that disturbance

ought to be permitted by a reasonable man to intrude itself into the process of the argument by which he must determine the reasonableness or the contrary of the Christian religion. It comes to this: Christianity in our epoch is once more confronted with a necessity, which it has often been compelled to confront in previous epochs of its existence—the necessity, namely, of correlating its fundamental truths with a wholly new and larger conception of the facts to which those truths have relevance. I repeat that this necessity has been encountered many times already. At the very start of Christian history the Gospel of Christ found itself compelled by circumstances to accept at the hands of St. Paul a great revision, perhaps the greatest it has ever accepted, in order to become competent to include satisfactorily within its theory the facts of Gentile Christianity. When Christianity, in the course of its

expansion, had come into contact with the current philosophies of Antioch and Alexandria, its range of vision and knowledge was greatly extended, and, accordingly, its theory was again and again revised. The history of Dogma, as Harnack has conclusively shown, is a history of a continual revision, determined by accessions of new knowledge, and always having the effect, when broadly estimated, of bringing under the control of the Christian theory new tracts of knowledge and experience.

At the Reformation, Christianity in the West more or less successfully rose to the perception and recognition of this necessity of continual revision and expansion, and now, in what we call the modern age, the acceptance of that necessity has become almost universally an agreed point among thoughtful Christians. I do not say that there is agreement as to the extent, or the nature,

of the revision of the Christian theory, which the new knowledge of the modern epoch requires, but that all thoughtful Christians are agreed that some such revision is necessary, and that no violation of Christian principle is implied in the attempt to make it. It may be that the current and generally accepted versions of Christian truth are becoming inadequate and unsatisfactory. Personally I make no secret of the fact that I think this is the case. I believe that we have entered on an epoch of transition, and therefore of revision, but I claim that no lesson emerges more clearly from an impartial study of Christian history throughout the whole period since Christianity had a history, than the compatibility of frequent and drastic revision of accepted versions of Christian truth with the continual maintenance of the truth itself. We modern Christians are in our turn being called upon to see

the revelation of God in Christ in larger connections, and the verdict of posterity upon us as faithful or unfaithful stewards of the sacred tradition will be determined by the frankness with which we recognise all the newly disclosed facts with which we must reckon, and the courage with which we allow them their legitimate influence on the theory of Christianity, which we maintain and transmit.

V.

The Moral Inadequacy of Historic Christianity.

PERHAPS of all the prejudices which obstruct the acceptance of Christianity, none is more powerful and none more apparently reasonable, than that which arises from the discrepancy between the moral aspect of Christian History and the sublime theory with which it may be said to start. In our first paper, we briefly adverted to this point ; we must now consider it more carefully. The objection may be stated in this way :— "You tell me that the Creator Himself was incarnate in Jesus Christ ; that within the Christian sphere there have been operating continuously new and extraordinary moral forces. It seems that the least that can be asked is that the moral aspect of Christendom should bear out your theory. There should be surely an unmistakable moral superiority

in the society which has taken shape under the influence of the Incarnation, but, as a matter of fact, what do we find? So far from moral superiority, being thus indisputable, it is the case that within the Christian sphere there have been witnessed, perhaps, the most appalling moral aberrations which the history of mankind records. For example, where, outside the Christian sphere, can any real parallel be found to the continuing and disastrous scandals which are associated with Christian asceticism and Christian persecution? It is not enough for you to justify the Christian theology by abstract reasoning, to prove to me that in pure reason these are no valid objections against an Incarnation, or to make clear that the Christian hypothesis provides, at least, as satisfactory an explanation of the Universe as any other. All this may be allowed and yet, if it be the case that, in point of

fact, Christianity has not exhibited and does not exhibit in its practice any really considerable moral superiority as the effect of the supernatural moral resources with which it claims to be endowed, then, for me at least, the question is closed; Christianity is unequal to its own theory." Now, it may be frankly admitted that there is great force in this reasoning, and certainly it would be lacking in candour not to admit that a real difficulty is presented by the morally unsatisfactory aspect of Christian History. But here, again, if we have patience to examine the facts carefully, we shall see that the force of the objection is not so great as at first sight appears, and that although a difficulty remains, it is not so much a difficulty in reason as a trial in faith.

In this paper it will be maintained that the great scandals of Christian History are demonstrably connected with the non-Christian forces in the development

of modern civilization, while the characteristic excellences of modern civilization, those which give to it a distinctive character and constitute its moral superiority, as we believe, over any other civilization of which we have knowledge, are precisely those which are demonstrably connected with the Gospel. Persecution and asceticism are not distinctively Christian. On the contrary, it is often urged against historic Christianity that in these particulars it exhibited but the familiar features of all human religions. Assuming this, we may indeed argue from the fact that within Christendom these pagan forces have exercised so wide and baneful an influence, that the Christian religion has been singularly helpless to withstand infection, but we cannot base on that foundation any argument against the quality of the religion itself. Moreover, it is always to be remembered, whenever comparison

is made between Christianity and other religions with respect to their moral influence, that the races, which have been under the discipline of Christianity, are precisely those which are naturally the most vigorous and martial races known to history. Everything within the Christian sphere, accordingly, tends to take a specially marked, and, so to say, exaggerated character.

If we ask what are the distinctive elements of Christian civilization, I suppose there would be a general consensus as to the answer. Nowhere else, it would be truly said, has there been so jealous a regard for the rights of the individual; nowhere else has the virtue of chastity been so highly regarded, and, as a consequence, domestic life so happily developed; nowhere else has charity gained so powerful a dominion in human life, and nowhere else is there a principle of social progress so apparently and

perpetually present in society. Now, all these points, all these characteristics, are demonstrably connected with the Gospel.

Let us take, by way of illustration, one expression of charity, the treatment of children. What was the prevailing doctrine about childhood when Christ was born in Bethlehem? It is a safe rule that the best statement of men's beliefs is their practice. Applying that rule to the case before us, we can have no doubt at all as to the general opinion of civilized mankind nineteen hundred years ago. I am not speaking now of the opinion of the brutal and degraded sections of ancient society. It would be as unfair to judge Paganism by such as it would be to judge Christianity by the slum and the police-court. No, I am speaking of the opinion as illustrated by the teaching of the best men of Pagan society. Now, for the purpose of our

present discussion, we may examine the question of Paganism with reference to the crime of infanticide.

Infanticide, probably, was commonly regarded as a wrong thing among the Pagans, though the greatest names of antiquity may be counted among its advocates and apologists, but it was considered a very venial offence.

"Infanticide," observes Mr. Lecky, "as is well known, was almost universally admitted among the Greeks, being sanctioned, and in some cases enjoined, upon what we should now call 'the greatest happiness principle,' by the ideal legislations of Plato and Aristotle, and by the actual legislations of Lycurgus and Solon."*

The exposition of children may be regarded as practically identical in moral

* "History of European Morals," vol. ii. p. 25-6, 11th ed.

turpitude with infanticide, and of exposition we may safely affirm that it was the rule and not the exception of Pagan life.

"The exposition of children," says Gibbon, "was the prevailing and stubborn vice of antiquity: it was sometimes prescribed, often permitted, almost always practised with impunity."*

The Stoic philosopher, Seneca, is justly regarded with admiration. His writings abound in utterances so profound, so true, so elevated, as to be not unworthy of comparison with the teachings of the New Testament. He must certainly be regarded as representing the highest morality of Paganism. He was a contemporary of the Apostle Paul, and the brother of that amiable Pro-Consul of Achaia, Gallio, to whose broad-minded equity the Apostle owed his escape from

* "Decline and Fall," vol. iv. p. 475, ed. Bury.

the violence of the Corinthian Jews. What was Seneca's opinion about these horrible practices of killing and exposing infants ? He leaves us in no doubt upon the matter. "Monstrous births we destroy," he writes, "children if they are weak and deformed we drown. It is not passion but reason to separate the useless from the sound." You may be sure that, if such was the teaching of the best Pagans, the practice of the average multitude proceeded on even lower principles. The utilitarian basis which the philosopher proposed for child murder would be exchanged by the selfish and the licentious for very much lower considerations. We know how, even in the face of Christianity, under the terror of righteously stern laws, watched by a justly resentful opinion, the cruelty of avarice and the abominable recklessness of lust continue to work out their achievements of infamy. What must the children

of the Pagans have endured when there were no restraining principles in religion, and no deterrent terrors in the law ?

We turn now to consider the attitude of Christianity towards the then prevailing practice of child murder and exposition. In the Gospels, and indeed generally in the New Testament, these offences are scarcely mentioned, for the sufficient reason that the writings of the New Testament belong almost entirely to the time when Christianity was face to face with Judaism, and Judaism was honourably free from the cruelty and profligacy which reigned in Pagan society. When we pass to the literature of the sub-Apostolic age, the case is different.

In the earliest treatises on Christian morals which have survived, we note that abortion and child murder are specifically condemned. I will content myself with a single reference to "The

doctrine of the twelve Apostles," a manual probably not later than the end of the first or the beginning of the second century.

"And the second commandment of the Teaching is: Thou shalt not kill. Thou shall not commit adultery; thou shalt not corrupt boys; thou shalt not commit fornication. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not use witchcraft; thou shalt not practise sorcery. *Thou shalt not procure abortion, nor shalt thou kill the new-born child.* Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods."*

An anonymous writer of the second century, the author of the Epistle to Diognetus, institutes a most interesting comparison between Christians and Pagans, from which I extract the following:

* "The Oldest Church Manual," ed. Schaff. 2nd ed. p. 167-9.

"Every foreign country is a Fatherland to them, and every Fatherland is foreign. They marry like all other men, and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives. They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh. Their existence is on earth, but their Citizenship is in Heaven."*

St. Justin Martyr, in the earlier of his Apologies, written probably about the year 148 of our era, bears a similar testimony. The compassion of Christians went forth to the deserted little ones doomed by their parents to death, or disgrace more terrible than death. The widows and virgins of the Church included among their regular works of piety the care of these outcast babes.

* "The Apostolic Fathers," p. 506, ed. Harmer.

Among the very earliest recorded charitable institutions, we find mention of Children's Homes or Orphanages. St. Ignatius counts it amongst tokens of those who hold strange doctrine touching the Grace of Jesus Christ that they have no care for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the afflicted, none for the prisoner, none for the hungry or thirsty. When persecution ceased, and with the conversion of Constantine, the perilous era of secular prosperity began, these institutions for destitute children attracted the lavish support of Christians, and it is well known that they retain their place in popular regard at the present time.

It would take us beyond the limits of this paper to trace the effect of Christian influence upon the legislation of the Empire, and it must suffice to quote Mr. Lecky's summary :

" It may be safely asserted that the

publicity of the trade in exposed children became impossible under the influence of Christianity, and that the sense of the serious nature of the crime was very considerably increased. . . . This minute and scrupulous care for human life and human virtue in the humblest forms, in the slave, the gladiator, the savage, or the infant, was indeed wholly foreign to the genius of Paganism. It was produced by the Christian doctrine of the inestimable value of each immortal soul. It is the distinguishing and transcendent characteristic of every society into which the spirit of Christianity has passed."*

We are justified then in claiming that the reverent regard for children, which is admittedly one of the most honourable characteristics of modern civilization, is really the creation of Christianity. It did not exist in pre-Christian Paganism,

* *Vide l. c.* pp. 32, 34.

and it has never existed outside the sphere of Christian influence. We have dwelt at some length on this single point as an example of a general process. If we take any other of the distinctive marks of modern civilization, we shall find, in the same way, that they must be traced to Christian influences. But here let me guard my argument against an easy misrepresentation. When we claim that the distinctive chastity and charity of Christendom are the creation of the Gospel, we are not for one moment denying that both chastity and charity are not Christian but humane. Our point is that both these admirable elements of human nature are everywhere unable to assert themselves successfully against other forces of a very different character, save within the Christian sphere, where they have been reinforced and illustrated by Christian teaching.

The case for Christianity may be stated

in another way. Throughout Christian history there has been exhibited in society a new and exalted type of human character. In Christian parlance the Saints have been continuously on the earth, and this saintly character is at once exceptional and representative, exceptional in degree of excellence, representative in moral type. Probably few candid and thoughtful students of social history would deny that the type of character common to the Christian Saints is the highest known to human experience and they would further admit that this type of character is directly traceable to the influence of the Founder of Christianity. The example of Jesus Christ has always been upheld by the Church as the model of human conduct, and it cannot be disputed that the enthusiasm of personal affection, which has been stirred in ardent souls towards Jesus Christ, has been the most powerful

educative influence conceivable. On this point we shall have something to say in a future paper. Here we confine ourselves to the single position that the Saints may be taken as the exponents of Christianity *with the least admixture of alien elements*, and it is precisely to *them* that the conscience of civilized men bears approving testimony. So we meet the objection against the religion of Christ which is based on the moral defects of Christian History by pointing out that the religion of Christ has not been the only factor in the process of social development; that when it is seriously attempted to disentangle the different constituents of civilization, as we know it, and to identify the specific effect of each one, it is found that exactly the best things are traceable to Christ's religion, and the worst things are clearly derived from other sources. It is no doubt one of the most serious obstacles to faith

that the redemptive process inaugurated by the Incarnation should be so strangely slow, and as it were intermittent, but, after all, our measurements of time are extremely ill-adapted for the criticism of eternal purpose, and we may perhaps borrow from the consistent teachings of contemporary science a large tolerance of delay. It hardly lies in the mouth of one who has accepted the theory of evolutionary science, and accustomed himself to think of almost unimaginably protracted periods as having been required for the development of the world we see, to build an argument against Christianity because its process of moral recreation is correspondingly gradual. So much has been achieved in the petty period of less than nineteen centuries since Christ started this process of spiritual evolution which is to culminate in "the new Heaven and new Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness," that

there is reason, not for scepticism and despondency, but for boundless hope.

VI.

Religion and Theology.

It is probably the case that a fair-minded reader of the preceding papers might be disposed to object that, however true in themselves my contentions may be, they are certainly not commonly accepted by Christians, that, in short, I offer a defence of the Christian religion which its most authoritative advocates, both in the past and in the present, would repudiate. There seems to me to be so much force in this objection that I propose to devote the present paper to its consideration.

First, let it be remembered that it is mere matter of fact that Christianity has for long periods been gravely misconceived by its professors. Doctrines that all Christians are now agreed to reject have been in previous ages of the Church tenaciously held, and, if extent and duration of belief were the tests of intrinsic

importance, then it is probable that these can be pleaded as easily in the interest of recognised error as in that of recognised truth. In every age there are specific parts of the Christian system which, for quite intelligible reasons, draw to themselves the principal attention of Christian men, and then, inevitably, these are exalted to a position of importance, which by no means rightly belongs to them, and which can be shown to reflect the special circumstances of the Church at the time rather than the intrinsic gravity of the paramount dogmas themselves. Broadly it may be said that in times of secular distress, persecution, and calamity, there has been a disposition to fasten on the *eschatological* elements of the Christian Religion. The afflicted Church of the earliest ages, for instance, was readily disposed to an over-confident dogmatism with respect to the Second Advent of Christ: the vast dogmatic

system of the Western Church, which deals with the fortunes of the human spirit after its departure from the body, was developed in the most troubled periods of the Middle Ages. The Apocalypse, which has been the common source from which the materials of eschatological speculation have most freely been drawn, may almost be regarded as an indicator of ecclesiastical affliction. When that book has been most precious in Christian eyes, and most often on Christian lips, we may be sure that the worldly circumstances of Christian folk are unusually depressing. *Sacramental* beliefs, in like manner, reached their highest importance during what may be called the barbarous epoch of Christian experience. The higher, more spiritual aspects of Christianity were beyond the apprehension of men, who had but just emerged from the debased beliefs and practices of paganism, and, accordingly,

the missionaries of the Gospel were under the strongest inducements to press on them those more intelligible elements of the Christian system, which, just because they were the most intelligible, were also the least exalted. Transubstantiation and the necessity of sacerdotal absolution were formally bound upon the Western Church in the thirteenth century, but the Papal legislation of that period only expressed and gave formal recognition to ideas and practices which were already of long standing. We might illustrate our thesis by many other examples, but there is no need, for the fact admits of no serious dispute. It is a mere truism that the "centre of gravity" in Christianity is constantly shifting, and that the principal agent in the process at any given time is the pressure of external circumstances.

It is to be remembered that theology, while always claiming for itself the

loftiest character, and deluding itself accordingly with the notion of finality in its religious decisions, is properly *progressive*. There is, of course, an unalterable core of truth, which forms the subject-matter of theological speculation, and which, however variously handled, remains essential to the Religion, of which indeed it is the distinctive element : but that unchanging truth is patient of almost infinite misunderstanding. Moreover, the theological truth of one age is the theological error of another, not merely because the theologians misconceived the primitive revelation, but because, though they conceived it rightly, they conceived it in false connections. Their knowledge was too limited to admit of any better statement than they offered; and, in point of fact, the orthodoxy they defended was for them and their contemporaries the truest version of Christianity within their reach. As knowledge

accumulated the theological definitions became defective ; they were no longer properly adjusted to the facts which had to be reckoned with ; and being thus inevitably obsolete, they became for later ages actually and increasingly false. Theology is never more than a provisional correlation of Christian Truth with the rest of human knowledge. Granting that the Christian Truth, being *ex hypothesi* a Divine Revelation, is unchanging, there is an infinite possibility of change in the human knowledge with which it must from time to time be correlated : and the theological statement will accordingly vary from age to age. Indeed it is strictly true to say that a theological statement begins to become obsolete almost as soon as it has been formulated : for it, like an Act of Parliament, sums up and marks the triumph of a movement of opinion, which begins at once, almost with the regularity of the tides, to recede

from its "high-water mark." The process in the one case is much slower than in the other, but there is a true parallelism. We are, therefore, justified in acquiescing in a continual variation of theological statement: and nothing can really be concluded against any specific version of Christianity *merely* on the ground of novelty.

Moreover we are free to point out that in claiming this freedom of continuous self-rectification, theology only stands with the rest of the sciences. If scientific men justly resent gibes against the natural sciences based on the rapidity with which theories rise and fall within the scientific area, if they justly insist on the properly progressive character of studies which are continually increasing their materials, it would seem to be sufficiently clear that they are bound in equity to concede an equal liberty to the theologians, who can plead the same

excuse for their variations. All the sciences have their postulates, which are unalterable, and theology is no exception : but all have to apply those postulates under ever-varying circumstances, with reference to an ever-enlarging accumulation of knowledge, and again theology is no exception. A familiar example will be the Christian doctrine with respect to the Creation of the Universe. The opening chapters of Genesis were held by theologians right down to the precincts of the last generation to provide an accurate and detailed account of the origin of the Universe. There was no serious rival to that account ; there were no facts ascertained by men of science and cognizable by the theologians which invalidated the accepted doctrine of the Church ; the wisest and most learned of Christians could offer no serious objection to the statements of the Bible. Then, as we all know, came the rapid develop-

ment of the physical sciences. Astronomy led the way, geology followed next, biology came last and went farthest : and men became conscious of an immense discrepancy between the current doctrine and the new knowledge. We know what happened. The first disposition which the new situation suggested to Christian men was that of indignant horror. The men of science were looked upon and treated as enemies of revealed truth, and many a shameful chapter of persecution, which we would give much to tear out of the record of the Church, was added to the History of Mankind : but, as time went on, and the martyrs of science drew in their train an ever-multiplying body of enthusiastic disciples, who pursued the same course, and built up on ever-securer foundations the fabric of Scientific Truth, a change passed over Christian minds. The epoch of persecution was succeeded by the epoch of arbitrary reconciliation.

Theology was in a transitional state, perplexed between the clear statements of the Book of Genesis, and the equally clear, and much better authenticated statements of the men of science, conscious of her proper task not to repudiate knowledge but to correlate it with her own first principles, pledged to bring into her scheme of truth all that could fairly be gathered under the description of truth. The curious, most ingenious, most well-intentioned, but, we must add, most futile and in many directions mischievous literature of the Biblical harmonizers came into existence and attained an immense bulk. Obviously the Church could not rest content with this transitional situation. The harmonists neither satisfied the old orthodoxy nor the new science. We are now reaching a further and a final stage, in which a distinction is drawn between the vital religious truth, and its theological statement.

The latter, we can see, may be, and indeed ought to be, frankly surrendered in deference to acquisitions of knowledge which invalidate it: the former—men of science are the first to admit—lies wholly beyond the range of their researches. The final repudiation of the pseudo-reconciliations of the harmonizers has, we may hope, been pronounced by Professor Driver in his recent edition of the Book of Genesis. "Fifty or sixty years ago," he writes, "a different judgment, at least on some of the points involved, was no doubt possible: but the immense accessions of knowledge, in the departments both of the natural sciences and of the early history of man, which have resulted from the researches of recent years, make it impossible now: the irreconcileability of the early narratives of Genesis with the facts of science and history must be recognised and accepted. To be sure, particular points

might probably be found, at which, by the adoption of forced interpretations of the words of Genesis, such as are both unnatural in themselves, and also obviously contrary to the intention of the writer, the conclusion in question could, in appearance, be evaded: but this method is at once unsound in principle and ineffectual: a forced exegesis is never legitimate; passages remain to which the method itself cannot be applied; nor, probably, has anything done more to bring the Bible into discredit than the harmonistic expedients adopted by apologists, which by those whom they are intended to satisfy and convince are seen at once to be impossible. . . . It follows that the Bible cannot in every part, especially not in its early parts, be read precisely as it was read by our forefathers. We live in a light which they did not possess, but which it has pleased the Providence of God to shed

around us ; and if the Bible is to retain its authority and influence among us, it must be read in this light, and our beliefs about it must be adjusted and accommodated accordingly. To utilize, as far as we can, the light in which we live, is, it must be remembered, not a privilege only, but a duty." *

Thus, while it certainly is the case that a thoughtful modern Christian, when he repeats the first article of his creed, " I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," does so with a very different notion of the process of creation than that which Christians of former times held, and to that extent lies open to the charge that, though the words of the Creed remain unaltered, the faith which they are meant to express has undergone considerable modification, it

* *V.* " The Book of Genesis," p. lxi. f. Methuen and Co., 1904.

is not the less true that the core of the religion remains the same, and the new conception of its bearings is as theologically sound as it is reasonably necessary.

Finally, I would ask of my opponents, Is Christianity alone of all religions to be judged, not by its admittedly best elements, but by those elements in its mingled history which Christians themselves deplore as abuses? Would you be ready to extend that treatment to those other great religions of mankind which we are not unaccustomed to hear described as the equals or even as the superiors of the religion of Christ? If you are justly indignant when you hear some half-educated Christian missionary describing the superstitions and vices of the worst sections of Buddhist or Mohammedan society, and building on the descriptions injurious conclusions with respect to the religions of Gautama and Mohammed, why do you insist on binding

upon the faith of Christ the worst things in Christendom ? In asking you to judge Christianity, not by the historic abuses, but by its original and essential teachings, I am but asking for the equal treatment of religions ; and the plea is as reasonable as it is just and charitable. Indeed, Christianity seems beyond all other religions entitled to this method of judgment, for Christianity alone, as the religion of the Incarnation of God in Christ, seems to make its truth depend on the adequacy of the Founder for the *rôle* thus assigned to Him. The truth of Buddhism cannot be said to depend on the character of Gautama, nor can the truth of Mohammedanism be said to depend on the character of its prophet ; in both cases the founders stand apart from their systems ; but with Christianity everything depends on the personal character of Jesus Christ. If, therefore, in these papers, I am continually going

behind the current teaching of Christendom, and basing my argument on the Founder himself, I am but following the plain reasons of the case. Christianity is not to be judged apart from Christ, and every man must settle his own attitude towards Christ if he would really face the question which needs answer. To say this is assuredly not to use the language of mere convention. "Christ Himself," says Harnack, "is Christianity," and he adds, "we cannot therefore state the 'doctrine' of Jesus; for it appears as a supramundane life which must be felt in the person of Jesus, and its truth is guaranteed by the fact that such a life can be lived." * Equity requires that Christianity should be judged in its essence, not in its historic perversions, and the essence of Christianity is Christ. "Science," not less than Christianity,

* *V.* "History of Dogma," vol. i. p. 70

needs the protection of this equitable rule. There are fanatics of science, who bring no credit to the general cause ; and it would be equally easy and unfair to discredit science by parading as its true exponents thsoe who in truth were destitute of the scientific spirit. Let equal treatment be extended to Christianity, and an astonishing mass of hurtful prejudice will be swept out of the great controversy.

VII.

The Old Testament.

In our last paper we were led to make some mention of the altered attitude of mind towards the Bible, which has manifested itself among Christian people as a consequence of the characteristic intellectual developments of modern times. In this paper I propose to consider somewhat more carefully the place which the Scriptures hold in the scheme of Christianity, and I shall limit myself to the case of the Old Testament. Let it be observed that there is no unreasonableness in deciding the main question on this issue, for the Scriptures of the Old Testament come to us with even weightier authentications than those which can be pleaded for the Scriptures of the New. The supreme authority of the Founder's teaching and example

can be advanced for the one, but not for the other ; and the scarcely less weighty authority of the Apostles is altogether limited to the same extent. It is certain that the writings which now form the New Testament were not in the first instance regarded as standing on the level of the older Scriptures. The Bible of the earliest Church contained no New Testament. It is, indeed, matter of common knowledge that complete agreement among Christians with respect to the Canon of the New Testament was not attained for many generations. Bishop Westcott, in his excellent "Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament," claims that "from the time of Irenaeus the New Testament was composed essentially of the same books which we receive at present,"* but he shows

* *Vide* p. 6. 5th ed.

that there was not a final end of questionings until a much later period. While, therefore, we accept the Old Testament on the authority of Christ and His Apostles, the New Testament comes to us on the sole authority of Christian usage, expressed and confirmed by ecclesiastical decisions. It is necessary to point out the relative superiority of the claim on Christian regard possessed by the Older Scriptures, so far as external authentication goes, because too often an irrational aversion to honest criticism of the New Testament shelters itself under the pretence that the Old Testament, which beyond all rational questioning lies open to critical treatment with the results we have indicated, stands on a lower religious level. We shall have occasion to appreciate the nature of the *spiritual supremacy* of the New Testament at a later stage in our discussion. Here it suffices to point out that higher spiritual

authority is nowise incompatible with inferior external authorization: and it is the latter which is important when we have under consideration the place which the Scriptures hold in the scheme of historic Christianity.

Forty years ago this question was the subject of prolonged and acrimonious controversy within the Church of England, and, though, at the time, there was much distress of mind among devout people, yet in the sequel much good resulted, for a juster understanding established itself in Christian thought. Bishop Thirlwall, of St. David's, perhaps the most intellectually distinguished prelate of his time, took occasion to deliver a Charge to his clergy in October, 1863, in which he passed the current controversy under review, and laid down some positions which we may well have in mind now. I shall not scruple to reproduce one paragraph of that Charge, as it

states the very points on which, in this paper, I desire to insist.

"Another thought which may well be brought home to our minds by the controversies of the day, is that we have greater need than ever to distinguish between things which do and things which do not concern our Christian faith and hope. A great part of the events related in the Old Testament has no more apparent connection with our religion than those of Greek or Roman history. It is true that even the minutest and seemingly most insignificant facts may have entered into the scheme of Divine Providence, as part of the process through which a way was prepared for the introduction of the Gospel. But this is no more than may be said of everything that has happened everywhere upon earth from the beginning of the world. The adaptation of the means to the end is one of the secrets of

the Divine counsels; and we cannot presume to say that the same end might not have been attained by some other means. This, therefore, is not sufficient to invest the means with any share in the sanctity of the end. The history, so far as it is a narrative of civil and political transactions, has no essential connection with any religious truth, and, if it had been lost, though we should have been left in ignorance of much that we should have desired to know, our treasure of Christian doctrine would have remained whole and unimpaired. The numbers, migrations, wars, battles, conquests, and reverses of Israel have nothing in common with the teaching of Christ, with the way of salvation, with the fruits of the Spirit. They belong to a totally different order of subjects. They are not to be confounded with the spiritual revelation contained in the Old Testament, much less with that fulness of grace and truth

which came by Jesus Christ. Whatever knowledge we may obtain of them is, in a religious point of view, a matter of absolute indifference to us; and, if they were placed on a level with the saving truths of the Gospel, they would gain nothing in intrinsic dignity, but would only degrade that with which they are thus associated. Such an association may indeed exist in the minds of pious and even learned men; but it is only by means of an artificial chain of reasoning, which does not carry conviction to all beside. Such questions must be left to every one's private judgment and feeling, which have the fullest right to decide for each, but not to impose their decisions, as the dictate of an infallible authority, on the consciences of others. Any attempt to erect such facts into articles of faith would be fraught with danger of irreparable evil to the Church,

as well as with immediate hurt to numberless souls."*

Now if Bishop Thirlwall's words be read carefully, it will be seen that he draws a distinction between the Old Testament as a *national literature*, and the Old Testament as containing the *spiritual revelation* which reached its climax in the Incarnation. In the first character, the Old Testament "is a narrative of civil and political transactions," and obviously "has no essential connection with any religious truth." In the last character the Bishop implies, though he does not actually say, that the Old Testament will always retain its worth as a witness to, and a commentary upon, the truth as it is in Jesus. This distinction is not only reasonable in itself, but it is also familiar to Christian thinkers. Essentially it was implied in

* *Vide* "Remains," ed. Perowne, vol. ii. p. 83.

the allegorism of the Alexandrine Fathers. Holding firmly to the traditional belief, inherited by the Church from the synagogue, that the Old Testament was truly one and inspired, they were none the less perplexed, both as Greeks and as Christians, by much that they found in it ; and the way out of their perplexity, the only way open to them in the existing state of knowledge, was the adoption of the familiar method of allegorical interpretation, which both their Jewish and their Pagan contemporaries were wont to employ. Dr. Bigg, in his admirable Bampton Lectures, has described the procedure of Origen, the greatest of the Christian allegorizers. "He held that innumerable passages in both Testaments have no sense at all except as Allegories. . . . Many passages of Scripture, he says, are excluded from belief by physical impossibility. Such are those which speak of morning and evening before the

creation of the Sun, the story of the Fall, and the carrying up of our Lord into an exceeding high mountain by Satan in the Temptation. Others again imply moral impossibilities. Such are those which speak of the child as punished for the sin of the parent, the law that on the Sabbath no Jew should take up a burden or move from his place, the precepts of the Saviour not to possess two coats, to pluck out the offending eye, to turn the right cheek to him that has smitten the left. Yet another class are rejected by the enlightened conscience. Such are the adventures of Lot, the cruelties of the Jewish wars, the execrations of the Psalms. All these antinomies of Scripcure were forced upon him on one side by the Ebionite and Gnostic, on the other by the Greek philosopher, who was beginning to study the Bible in a spirit of not wholly unfriendly curiosity, and was violently repelled by these proofs,

as he thought them, of Jewish barbarism. Origen felt the embarrassment most acutely, and his fearless logic saw but one way of escape. These passages, he admitted, in their literal sense are not true. Why then, urged the adversary, are they found in what you Christians call the Word of God? To this he replied that, though in one sense untrue, they are in another the highest, the only valuable truth. They are permitted for an object. These impossibilities, trivialities, ineptitudes, are wires stretched across our path by the Holy Spirit, to warn us that we are not in the right way. We must not leap over them; we must go beneath, piercing down to the smooth broad road of the spiritual intelligence. They are the rough outer husk, which repels the ignorant and unfit reader, but stimulates the true child of God to increased exertion. The letter is the external garb, often sordid and torn, but 'the

king's daughter is all glorious within.' It is as if the sunlight streamed in through the crannies of a ruinous wall ; the wall is ruinous in order that the sunlight may stream in." Dr. Bigg points out the strength and the weakness of Origen's method. Its strength lay in the frank recognition of a real difficulty ; its weakness lay in the arbitrary even fantastic character of the allegorical interpretation by which he endeavoured to meet that difficulty. "To us it is not difficult to allow that the Old Testament is the history of a people and not merely of a religion, that God's revelation is progressive, that He speaks by human messengers, that something has been permitted because of the hardness of men's hearts. But to the Alexandrines, bound as they were by their Jewish theory of inspiration and beset by eager foes, it was not easy to admit all this. Concessions are not readily made by men

struggling for all that they hold dear. Nor indeed was the notion of historical development familiar to their times. Perhaps we may say that its first fruitful germ is found in the Church, in the qualified admission of the inferiority of the Old Testament to the New. The Alexandrines went so far as to explain certain passages—those which attribute human figure and emotions to God—by the principle of accommodation or condescension, and Origen even admitted the existence of degrees of inspiration. Through these observations lay the way to a clear solution of the difficulty. But though the key was actually in the lock, Origen did not turn it. The time had not yet come."*

Dr. Bigg draws the same distinction

* *Vide* "The Christian Platonists of Alexandria," Bampton Lectures, 1886. pp. 137-8, 147.

as that drawn by Bishop Thirlwall. Both perceive the importance of the fact that "the Old Testament is the history of a people and not merely of a religion." To admit this is to admit that the Old Testament contains large, very large, non-religious elements, for the history of a people is by no means only religious, nor will the literature which expresses the national life be only religious. It is not sufficiently remembered that the Old Testament contains practically the whole extant literature of ancient Israel, and therefore when the limits of the Jewish canon of Scripture are discussed by a modern student the discussion tends to have a somewhat unreal aspect. Selection there may have been, but no means of judging it remain to us, for the sufficient reason that there is no competition of documents until we come to the precincts of the Christian era, and then the competition is on a very

limited scale. "Only in the case of two extant writings is there any probability that an attempt may have been made, in some quarters, to include them within the Canon, *i.e.*, Ecclesiasticus and the First Book of Maccabees. In both instances there never seems to have been any real approach to success."* The so-called Apocryphal Books came into Christian acceptance through the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament, which contained them, and which the early Church generally used. I do not wish to build more on the fact that it can fairly sustain, but at least it cannot be without significance that the thirty-nine canonical "books" of the Old Testament do, in point of fact, constitute an entire national literature, and that the normal

* *Vide* Bishop Ryle's "Canon of the Old Testament," p. 183.

characteristics of a national literature are evidently present in them.

Why, then, has this national literature so great religious importance that the Christian Church has consecrated it for her own spiritual uses? Putting aside as no longer worthy consideration, the arbitrary letter-worship pre-supposed by the allegorical method of interpretation, and admitting, as we must admit, that whatever theory of inspiration we may adopt must be inferred from the Scriptures and cannot be imposed upon them, what defence can we offer for the solemn dignity with which, as Christians, we invest these Jewish writings? I think that, in the last result, we must take our stand on the fact that those writings *are* a national literature, that is, that they uncover, as only such literature can, the life of that Nation which was providentially commissioned to be "the priest of the peoples." If we recognise in the

historic Jesus the culminating-point of Divine Self-revelation—and this is implied in the notion of the Incarnation—then we cannot but maintain that the history of the Jewish People, from which Jesus Christ came, was inspired with a purpose of unique and sublime importance. The Mission of our Saviour manifestly stands in succession to the ministry of the prophets of Israel ; the Gospel is historically unintelligible apart from the history of Israel. The Christian Church was making no unwarranted claim when it applied to itself the names and attributes of the "chosen people." S. Augustine's famous formula, "in veteri testamento novum latet ; in novo vetus patet," is seen to be true by every student of the Bible. It is not by an accident that the same sacred compositions utter the praise of Jews and Christians alike. The solidarity of Christianity and Judaism, so impressively symbolized by the

union of the Old and New Testaments in the Christian Bible, is becoming evident to thoughtful Jews. A modern Jewish writer includes "Jesus of Nazareth" among "Jewish forerunners of Christianity," and plainly accounts Him the noblest of the company. "I desire," he says, "to place clearly before men of our day the community of spiritual thought which, beginning with Hillel, runs through, and is consecrated by, the life-and-death agony of the Man of Suffering of Galilee." He is anxious to avert from the Jewish people responsibility for the rejection of the great Prophet, which he attributes to the hierarchy. "The man Jesus is the most heroic, the grandest, the noblest personality of all time and age. Even in the shadow of Golgotha let us, however, be just and not lay the charge of the great Crime on those who did not commit it. It was not the Mosaic Law, nor the Jewish

people, nor the great body of its teachers, the Pharisees, who steeped their hands in the blood of Christ. That was exclusively the work of the Sadducean High Priest and his servile adherents."* In less ardent language, Mr. Claud Montefiore concludes his interesting Hibbert lectures with some cautious, but significant suggestions, for an acceptance by his co-religionists of some of the teachings of the Gospel. "If, then, Judaism be still destined to play a prominent and fruitful part in the religious history of the world, it may, perhaps, be that this new stage in its development will only ensue when it has harmoniously assimilated to itself such of the Gospel teachings as are not antagonistic, but complementary, to its own fundamental dogmas,

* *Vide* "Jewish Forerunners of Christianity." By Adolph Danziger, pp. 32, 52. (John Murray 1904.)

and has freely and frankly acknowledged the greatness, while maintaining the limitations, of the illustrious Jew from whose mouth they are reported to have come."* Thus from the side of the older Religion comes admission of the true solidarity of the Old Testament and the New, and the notion, so familiar to Christians, of the Gospel as the greatest utterance of Jewish prophecy is evidently pushing its way into Jewish minds.

The fact of the Incarnation, which must be the necessary starting-point of Christian thought, throws back upon the history of Israel an illumination which redeems it from the unimportance which naturally belonged to it, and clothes it with unique religious significance. A national history, indeed, it is ; but there is this to be added, that the nation was ordained of God to provide the historic

* *Vide* "Hibbert Lectures for 1892," p. 551.

milieu of the Life of Christ : " *Ye search the Scriptures,*" He is reported to have said to the Jews, " *because ye think that in them ye have eternal life ; and these are they which bear witness of Me ; and ye will not come to Me that ye may have life.*"* Christians need no better reason for their religious use of the Old Testament than such words offer ; yet if additional reason were required, it could be found in the accumulated testimonies of Christian experience. It was of the Old Testament that in the first age these words were written ; the last age, with the records of intervening history at hand, affirms their truth : " *Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness ; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.*"†

* S. John v. 39, 40. † 2 Timothy iii. 16, 17.

VIII.

The New Testament.

In such discussions as have engaged our attention in these papers it is extremely important to keep well in view the standpoint which we have elected to accept. It is not at all our purpose to say all we think or believe about the Religion we profess, but only to examine and appraise certain aspects of it. We imagine ourselves arguing in presence of candid non-Christians, who have, as they hold, a case against us as men who profess a creed which violates reason, and not less as men who reject alternative beliefs intrinsically more reasonable. From the circumstances under which we write it has been unavoidable that we should treat specific points without attempting to correlate them and set all out in a complete case: and of course we thus stand open to the risk of being

portentously misunderstood. We may appear to ignore, or even to disallow, considerations of great intrinsic importance, which yet, from the standpoint we have chosen, are properly irrelevant to our argument. This risk appears inevitable, and we can do no more in the matter of self-protection than point it out.

In the last paper we considered the position which the Old Testament has in the scheme of Christianity, and we attempted to show that there was a basis in reason for that position: in this paper we go on to consider the position of the New Testament, which, as we have indicated, comes to us with inferior external authority, but is none the less universally allowed to possess superior religious value. We are not now concerned with the beliefs about the New Testament which Christians have held, but with the position which can reasonably be assigned

to the New Testament in the Christian system. What is the function of these documents which justifies the supreme importance attached to them in the Church of Christ? Does the Christian use of the New Testament imply anything unreasonable in itself? Treated freely and frankly, as all historical memorials from a distant past must be treated, do these Christian writings suffice for the burdens laid on them by the Christian Religion? Does Christianity bind us to any disloyalty to our reason in the handling of the New Testament? These are the questions we have in mind throughout the present discussion. In the brief space at our disposal we can do no more than indicate the directions in which we should seek the answers.

Christianity has been called a historical religion, and it is of great importance to understand exactly what the phrase

implies. In one sense, indeed, it is the merest of platitudes. Christianity is obviously the religion of Christ, and the mission of Christ is a fact, or series of facts, certified by history. So much might be said of other religions. In this sense Buddhism and Mohammedanism are historical religions. Evidently we mean something more than this when Christianity is called a historical religion by way of distinguishing it from all other religions. Other religions are not, as we have already indicated in a previous paper, dependent for their truth and their power on the personal excellence of their respective founders. Christianity, on the contrary, is the religion of the Incarnation, that is, its Founder is held to be in Himself the true and perfect exponent of God. Not Christ's teaching merely, but His life and character, constitute the revelation which He made to mankind. And hence it follows that an

accurate knowledge of the life and teaching of Christ is of the very utmost consequence to Christians, and the New Testament has its unique value precisely because it contains practically all that has survived to us about the Founder of Christianity. Outside the four Gospels there are indeed a few words of Christ and a few more or less doubtful traditions about Him, but making the largest allowance for these, it is certain that, within the narrow compass of the four Gospels, the Christian Church possesses practically the whole knowledge about its Founder which it lies within its power to gain. Moreover in the Apostolic epistles we have recorded the impression made by Christ upon the first generation of believers, and these documents thus serve the purpose of a most valuable commentary on the evangelic narratives.

It will be at once apparent that from the point of view of a thoughtful Christ-

ian the documents of the New Testament demand at his hands the most searching examination. Christianity, we say, is a historical religion, and, therefore, historical criticism would seem to be a necessary instrument for the purpose of Christian teaching. The core of the Christian revelation is precisely the life, character and teaching of Christ, and all these belong to us in a slender collection of ancient documents presenting, as all ancient documents necessarily present, many difficult problems, upon the solution of which a just understanding of their contents depends.

Historical criticism is the science to which properly belongs the solution of such problems. Human experience knows no other instrument so trustworthy. It is, of course, notorious that within the Christian sphere tradition has been constantly represented as the true authority for determining all questions

respecting the Christian documents, but as controversialists have often pointed out, no tradition has reached us with anything like the same claim on our acceptance as the documents themselves, and therefore while it is true that the New Testament must always be the criterion of tradition, it is not less true that tradition can rarely, if ever, be the criterion of the New Testament.

Christian theology accordingly would seem to be dependent at every point on the sound interpretation of the Christian documents. Before the theologian can enter on his solemn and difficult task, the critic must provide him with a true text of the canonical scripture and the historian must present the testimony of the sacred writers in its true temporal and local connections. What is called the higher criticism * is really an

It may be serviceable to reproduce here Dr. Sandays' definitions of the "Lower" and the

indispensable auxiliary of interpretation and a fortiori of theology. We may illustrate our point by a reference to what everybody will at once admit is the very central doctrine of Christianity. What was implied in the Incarnation of

"Higher" criticism in the volume, entitled "Criticism of the New Testament." (Murray, 1902), p. 1; "The criticism of any work of antiquity has two branches, which are commonly distinguished as the Lower Criticism and the Higher. The Lower Criticism deals with the smaller questions of words and text. Its problem is to determine as nearly as may be what the author really wrote. The Higher Criticism deals with the larger questions of authorship, date, sources, composition, literary and historical character. Its problem is to set the writing in its place among other writings; to determine where it comes in place and time and what are its relations, internal and external: I mean what are the relations of the parts that compose it to the whole, and what are the relations both of the parts and of the whole to the surrounding literature and history, *i.e.*, broadly to the intellectual, and, in the case of the New Testament, to the religious conditions of the time."

God in Christ? What was the nature and the measures of that self-chosen Kenōsis of the Son of God, by means of which He became the Teacher, King, and Saviour of the human race? We have no means of knowing save the record of the New Testament. To understand aright the witness of the New Testament is to be provided with the materials of a sound Christology. For the modern theologian to accept the New Testament in its current interpretation unanalyzed, uncriticised, unrelated with the conditions under which it originally took its shape, is to build the doctrinal fabric without first taking heed to the foundations. This indeed was the method of the mediæval schoolmen. Why is it that so great neglect has fallen upon the stupendous labours of those indefatigable thinkers? Certainly it is not the case that the mediæval schoolmen were intellectually unworthy of modern regard.

On the contrary, many excellent modern judges would confess that in point of sheer intellectual force St. Thomas Aquinas or Albertus Magnus have had no superiors. Nor is any fault to be found with their methods of reasoning. Their logic is close, their insight is keen, their dialectical courage is splendid, but one thing is lacking in their work, and that precisely is the condition of permanent value in all intellectual work. The postulates of their reasoning are unsound, their facts are too often no facts. They build on a tradition which they never dreamed of doubting, and which we know to have been extremely untrustworthy, and hence it is that for the modern student the work of the schoolmen has little value. It cannot be too often insisted on that the preliminary condition of sound theological thinking is a just interpretation of the documents, and that a just interpretation of the

documents implies not only what is called the lower criticism, by which the true text of the sacred writers is recovered, but also the higher criticism by which the methods of composition, the aims and objects of the writers, the modes of thinking and expression are examined and as far as possible ascertained. If these be the reasonable procedures of Christians desirous to understand their faith, they are absolutely indispensable when Christians come to discuss their faith with those who are not Christians. For, manifestly, the New Testament has one character when read by believers for the nourishment of their religious life, and another character when offered to unbelievers as the justification for the Christian faith about its Founder. It is only by observing this distinction that we can avoid the ancient fallacy of arguing in a circle. "Why must I believe the Church? Because the Bible

says so. And why believe the Bible? Because the Church says so." This argument has played a great part in religious discussions, and still in a thousand forms, more or less concealed, it is to be met with in the field of religious debate. The true position is rather this. In the first instance the Christian society claims the attention of men with its doctrine about Christ, and when men ask for the proofs of that doctrine, the Church offers first of all the documents of the New Testament, not as canonical, not as sacred, not as in any sense exempt from the normal treatment, but simply as historical materials, the means of forming a reasonable decision on the questions submitted for examination. Manifestly if a student of the New Testament discover that their evidence does not bear out the doctrine of the Church, it will be in vain to press that doctrine on his acceptance, but if on the contrary

a free and impartial examination of the documents justifies *so far as it goes* the doctrine of the Church, then the Church has so far established its case. We must, however, ask how far does the appeal to the New Testament carry us ? The great presuppositions of Christianity are, of course, altogether independent of the Christian documents. Christianity assumes the lofty Theism of the prophets, and from the first it has included the philosophic doctrines of the divine immanence in the universe, and of the immortality of the soul. What used to be called natural religion is the basis on which Christianity builds its characteristic doctrines, and therefore these vital truths of religion are not properly in question when the New Testament is examined. The student of the New Testament equally with the authors of the New Testament takes these for granted, and seeks in his study

to discover how far the revelation of truth in and by Jesus Christ justifies its necessary claim to be the true climax and interpretation of the religious achievement of mankind.

The two questions which must be answered by an honest examination of the New Testament, that is, of the primitive Christian documents which are substantially included without exception in the New Testament, are these. On the one hand, Is there anything in the facts of the Life of Christ which disallows the Christian doctrine about Him? On the other, Is there anything in the authentic teaching of Christ which disallows the doctrine and practice of the Christian Church? It will be observed that I have not said that the New Testament, impartially examined, can demonstrate the Christian belief about Christ, for indeed that belief has a profounder and more complex origin. What Christ is

reported by St. Matthew to have said to Simon Peter, when first of all the Apostles he confessed His Messiahship, utters a truth, which enters into every genuine discipleship, "*Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.*"* Religious conviction is something more than a sound inference from ascertained facts: the conscience and the heart have their place in the process of "conversion:" and it must always be the case that "*except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God*";† but it can never be seriously believed that these activities of the Divine Spirit can at any point require or tolerate infidelity to truth: and we must certainly maintain that in that specific sphere where the doctrine comes under the criticism of history, we can only act religiously when we apply with exactitude the

* S. Matthew xvi. 17. † S. John iii. 3.

methods and accept with willingness the results of historical science. To this extent, therefore, the doctrine of the Church stands at the bar of criticism. What we believe about Christ can never reasonably be allowed to *contradict* the facts of His history, as these are conveyed to us in the documents, justly examined ; but that belief, so far determined, will necessarily *transcend* the meagre knowledge which from the documents alone we can gain. Moreover, we cannot reasonably ignore the evidence of Christian history, continued now through 1900 years : that evidence, of course, cannot carry into the primitive tradition anything that was not originally there, but it can bring out into prominence elements which were obscured, and demonstrate the soundness of inferences which only experience could draw. An example of what is meant may be offered in the case of such an utterance of Christ as that so

familiar and so precious to English Churchmen as the first of "the comfortable words of our Saviour Christ," which are included in the service of the Holy Communion. No study of the New Testament, however careful and honest, could convey the full meaning of Christ's Words of Invitation: "*Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.*"* The critic necessarily reads the words in their historic connection, and interprets them solely with reference to those to whom they were spoken. Thus HOLTZMANN† understands by the labouring and heavy-laden those who "because of the place

* S. Matthew xi. 28-30.

† "The Life of Jesus," pp. 284-285. A. & C. Black. 1904.

they occupy in the social scale" are so to be described: but Christian experience through nineteen centuries has authorized, nay, has necessitated, a grander and profounder understanding of Christ's words. We cannot reasonably ignore the fact that in the experience of so many men under such various conditions, Christ has been found to lift the burden of guilt from the conscience and to give peace to the troubled mind; and, though we may not in the first instance recognise this deep spiritual significance in the words of the Gospel, yet, surely we are following the guidance of reason as well as yielding to the suggestions of piety, when we accept the experience of Christendom as a trustworthy commentary on the sacred text. The Christ of History is, first, the Christ whose Life and Character are made known to us in the documents of the New Testament; and, then, the Christ who

has made Himself known in the protracted and various life of the Christian society. The last revelation explains the first, and is itself explained by it: the first never can be altered by the last, which properly it enables and determines.

So, as a result of all this, we reach our conclusion. The supremacy of the New Testament arises from nothing arbitrary or irrational, and depends on nothing of the kind. Christianity being a historical Religion has in its documents the title-deeds of its spiritual heritage, and the standing apology for its own existence. What BISHOP WESTCOTT* wrote of the Bible as a whole is pre-eminently true of the New Testament. "The Church offered a living commentary on the Book, and the Book an unchanging test of the Church." This critical function of the New Testament manifestly assumes the

* *Vide* "The Bible in the Church," p. 11.

greater importance as the Church departs ever more widely from its primitive simplicity of faith and life : and for its due exercise the New Testament must be freely studied without the risks and embarrassments of ecclesiastical tradition. Thus studied the Christian finds in his sacred writings, not the obedient creature of any system whether of theology or of government, but an ever-fresh witness of vital truth, "*the truth as it is in Jesus.*"

IX.

Christ and the Church.

Among the publications of the Rationalist Press Association few are likely to become more popular, and few are likely to be more effective for the anti-Christian purposes of the Association, than the translation of a vehement denunciation of current Christianity, by Count Camille de Renesse, entitled, "*Jesus Christ: His Apostles and Disciples in the Twentieth Century.*" A brief "translator's foreword" gives some striking information about this work. We learn that since its publication in Belgium, four years ago, 100,000 copies have been sold in the original French, and as many in a Flemish translation; that translations into Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese have also been made, and have been eagerly bought; that the Spanish translation reached twenty-one editions in a

single year. The author writes with point, eloquence, and fervour, and his theme is one which never fails to be interesting to the populations of Christendom. In a short preface, specially written for the English edition, he thus explains his object in writing :

" The world of religion is divided into a number of sectarian countries. It was for the supporters of the most numerous and most ancient sect—for the peoples of Catholic countries—that I wrote this little book. But, although I did not have specially in view the modifications of the Christian faith which were produced by the Reformation, nevertheless as the Protestant religion, in all its variations, is based upon the same fundamental sources as the Roman Catholic religion—that is to say, upon the Bible and the Gospels—it does not seem to me devoid of utility to draw the attention of the heirs of Luther and

Melancthon to the unfaithfulness—the *infidelity*—of the whole of our modern Christianity, and to emphasize the decisive divorce of its essential principles from the grand humanitarian ideas of Christ.

"From him the believers attached to all the Churches derive their name; but—strange inconsistency—though they bedeck themselves with his garments, left there at the foot of the cross; though they carry about them the sign of his suffering and kneel before his altars, they possess none of his liberalizing spirit. For this reason those who truly continue Christ's work in our midst are not our Protestant or Catholic believers, but Freethinkers like Renan, Huxley, and Haeckel, whose ideal dream was that of a rational and radical reformation based on Science and Human Solidarity."

The author opens with a vigorous but extremely bitter description of the familiar but always fresh and painful discord

between the Gospel and the Church, and having demonstrated, as he thinks, an abject and utter contradiction between the Founder and His followers, he builds on it the contention that the Founder could not have been divine, for, had He been so, He must have secured for Himself a large success. We have said something already* on the difficulty suggested by the moral weakness of Christendom, and we do not propose to return to that point here; rather we would consider a question, related but not identical, which emerges on every page of Count Camille de Renesse's book. How far must Christ be held responsible for the procedure of His Church? What is the relation between the Religion and the external system which historically has represented

* *Vide* the Fifth Paper of this series.

it? Is the development of the original Gospel to be rightly traced in the official action of the Christian Church? The issue may be stated variously, but it includes this eminently practical question: "What is the nature and extent of ecclesiastical authority?" It is, of course, the case that, from the first, there has been within the Church a disposition on the part of the Hierarchy to claim the right to speak with Divine Authority. St. Paul, indeed, drew a distinction between his personal judgment and the decision of Christ; but the "*apostles and elders*"* of Jerusalem did not scruple to send forth their letter to the Gentiles with the tremendous formula, "*it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us.*"†

* *Vide* 1 Cor. vii. 10 and *cf.* v. 12 and v. 40.

† *Vide* Acts xv. 28.

It would not be excessive to say that, as the Church receded farther from the Apostolic age, and from the apparent inspirations which marked off that age from every succeeding period, so the claim to speak with Divine Authority was more largely insisted upon. In the Roman Catholic Church the process has continued without intermission, and within living memory has reached the grotesque climax of a formal definition of official infallibility vested in the supreme Pontiff. Precisely, therefore, within the Roman Catholic sphere the consequences of a strict identification of Christianity with the Church are most plainly seen. All blunders in politics, all failures in morals, all errors in science, all scandals in administration which belong to the current ecclesiastical system are carried over to the credit of the Religion which it is assumed to express with plenary right and divinely

guaranteed accuracy. Christian history thus becomes one long indictment of Christianity. Hence the notorious fact that it is only within the Roman Catholic sphere, where the absolute identification of Christianity and the Church is part of the official creed, that dislike of Christianity takes a violent and bitter character. Mr. John Morley, in his admirable analysis of Voltaire's attitude towards religion, justly emphasizes the point that the Church rather than the Gospel provoked his hostility. "In examining the Voltairean attack upon religion we have to remember that it was in the first instance prompted, and throughout its course stimulated and embittered, by antipathy to the external organization of the religion. It was not merely disbelief in a creed, but exasperation against a church;" * This point ought certainly

* *Vide* "Voltaire," p. 216.

to be remembered in every discussion of the famous Apostle of modern unbelief. "Voltaire's works," observes Mr. Saintsbury in his excellent article in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," "and especially his private letters, constantly contain the word 'l'infâme' and the expression in full or abbreviated 'écrasez l'infâme.' This has been misunderstood in many ways—the mistake going so far in some cases to suppose that Voltaire meant Christ by this opprobrious expression. No careful and competent student of his works, whatever that student's sympathies, has ever failed to correct this gross misapprehension. 'L'infâme' is not God; it is not Christ: it is not Christianity: it is not even Catholicism. Its briefest equivalent may be given as 'persecuting and privileged orthodoxy' in general, and more particularly it is the particular system which Voltaire saw around him, of which he had felt

the effects in his own exiles and the confiscations of his books, and of which he saw the still worse effects in the hideous sufferings of Calas and La Barre, and in the less hideous but still severe miseries of persons perfectly guiltless, even according to their tormentors, such as the families of Calas and Sirven." Count Camille de Renesse, like Voltaire, is far more influenced by exasperation against the Roman Church than by disbelief in the Christian Creed; and the last is very obviously connected with the view forced on him by the official representatives of Christianity, that only by accepting the Roman Church can he believe the Christian Creed. Certainly the situation is a difficult one. Who can be blamed for assuming that to be the true version of Christianity which Christians themselves propose and insist upon? I must say frankly that I do not see how, on Roman Catholic assumptions, the

case for Christianity is to be defended. If the influence of Christ is properly traceable in the official action of the Church, I for one should be forced to "throw up my brief" for the Religion of the Incarnation. It is because I hold those assumptions to be radically unsound, because I believe myself free to trace sufficiently the effect of the Incarnation, not in the narrow sphere of the official Church procedure, but in the general life of Christendom, that I find it my duty not only to profess myself a Christian, but also to draw sword for the defence of the Faith.

Exasperation whether against a Church or against an individual is not favourable to just judgments or to the calm and careful inquiries on which alone just judgments in complicated questions must be based. We may sympathize with men, placed as both Voltaire and Count Camille de Renesse have been placed,

under the dull and blighting influence of an ecclesiastical system which seems at every point an arrogant contradiction of the New Testament. We may (I think that in justice we must) recognise a genuine moral earnestness in their vehement protests against an institution which, in many directions, is plainly not working for righteousness; but when they would carry us on the wave of their invective against the Church to a definite repudiation of Christianity, then we must insist on a more sober method, a more extended outlook, a juster and more sympathetic judgment. The verdict of nineteen centuries is not to be so easily gathered and so decisively pronounced. "We get very wearied," says Mr. John Morley of Voltaire's historical arguments —and we cannot say anything else of the Belgian Count's—" of the persistent identification of the Church throughout the dark ages with fraud, and imposture,

and sinister self-seeking, when we have once learnt, what is undoubtedly the most important principle in the study of those times, that it was the Churchmen who kept the flickering light of civilization alive amid the raging storms of uncontrolled passion and violence."*

We come, then, to the question suggested by the book we have read with so much sympathy and such profound disagreement. What is the relation between Christianity and the Church? Is there no middle way between the Roman Catholic position and the negation of all ecclesiastical authority? Are we really shut up to the choice between spiritual bondage and religious individualism? If we seek the answer to these questions, where alone it would seem reasonable to do so, in the New Testament, as explained

* *Vide* "Voltaire," p. 323.

by the light of reason in the light of experience, we shall not seek in vain. We find that Christ designed the formation of a Christian Society, and that His ethical system was definitely social. This is clear, even when He decisively repudiated conventional notions of order and authority. Thus we are told that when He rebuked the ambition of the sons of Zebedee, He drew a sharp distinction between the current conception of office and that which was to obtain in His kingdom, and He left it nowise doubtful that His kingdom had officers, though chosen on another basis, in the service of other ideals. "*Jesus called them to Him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you: but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever*

would be first among you shall be servant of all."* Similarly, when He rebuked the ostentation and love of pre-eminence which marked the Scribes and Pharisees, He was careful to prohibit among His followers the kind of authority which those evil dispositions pre-supposed, and at the same time He emphasized the social aspect of discipleship. "*Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren.*"† The truth that discipleship to Christ implies membership of the society of Christ's disciples, and, as necessarily following from this, the notion that Christ's society would follow the law of all societies and fulfil its corporate life through institutions and officials, underlie the proud claims of the historic Christian Hierarchy. As

* *Vide* St. Mark x. 42-44.

† *Vide* St. Matt. xxiii. 8.

against the mere individualism which would repudiate common responsibilities those claims have validity; in themselves they are excessive and indefensible.

In truth we ought to distinguish between the professed and the valid claims of the Christian Ministry, for just claims may be advanced on false grounds, and excessive claims may be built on a sound foundation. This, indeed, would seem conspicuously the case with the Christian Ministry. As the constitutional executive of the society of Christ's disciples it could rightfully claim the obedience of Christians for all constitutional purposes, and these purposes would determine the extent of authority actually exercised, and the specific forms under which such authority was administered. At the start of its history, before experience had revealed the necessities which the Christian society would have

to face, there was naturally most emphasis laid on the principles which that society embodied and was divinely commissioned to proclaim; but, as time passed, and many unforeseen contingencies emerged, the organization of the Christian society took a larger place in the general scheme. Thus it is not to be inferred from the admitted fact that the Gospel is plainly unfavourable to ecclesiastical claims in the technical sense, that those claims are properly baseless: they must find their justification not in the region of first principles, to which the Gospels mainly belong, but in the lower latitudes of expediency. Moreover, this explains another circumstance, which is properly fatal to the clear-cut theories of ecclesiastical organization which are commonly maintained by the adherents of Divine-right systems, but which is none the less apparent on the face of Christian history, viz., that

ecclesiastical organization has been, in its external aspects, determined by contemporary political models. The Church has run a parallel course to the State; and so close has been the correspondence that there is hardly a feature in the organization of the Catholic Church which cannot be related to some secular model. Just as the varying and various forms of civil government are all sufficiently justified by the broad and persistent fact that without some form of civil government society cannot cohere and develop; so with the varying and various forms of spiritual government. *Their* justification also lies always in the standing necessity of the Christian society to have *some* form of spiritual government. Divine-right theories have haunted both spheres alike, and in both they have the same disproof and the same excuse. In Church as in State, the efficiency of governments has varied immensely; in

both the abuses of governments have been grave and obstinate, working vast wrong and inducing destructive revolutions. In neither can such abuses disprove the case for government as such, or compromise the claims of society, whether civil or spiritual. Thus, then, we are led to distinguish between the Christian religion and the Christian society, which properly expresses it, and again between the Christian society or Church, and the Ministry or official executive through which it properly acts; and we submit that these distinctions are both reasonable and important. As it would be absurd to build an argument for anarchy on the abuses of civil government, so it seems not less absurd to base a repudiation of Christianity on the scandals of the Christian hierarchy. Yet nothing else is really the course pursued by such writers as Count Camille de Renesse.

The unreasonableness of this course is more than ever apparent when it is remembered that the Founder of Christianity was at the pains to warn us against forming the kind of expectations with respect to His Church which are presupposed in these vehement denunciations of ecclesiastical faults. Our Lord even contemplated the complete failure of His followers, and though He assured them that the Church would not wholly fail, yet he used language of such solemn and threatening gravity that no measure of partial defeat can be said to exceed its suggestion. It will suffice to refer to the warnings in the Sermon on the Mount.

"*Ye are the salt of the earth,*" He said to His disciples, "*but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.*"*

* S. Matthew v. 13.

Moreover, He insisted, even while foretelling large moral failures in His disciples, that the one test by which His Church was to be recognised was the test of morality. "*A good tree*," He said, "*cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy Name, and by Thy Name cast out devils, and by Thy Name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from Me ye that work iniquity.*"* We are required by the express teaching of Christ to bring all claimants to the Christian name to the

* Ibid vii. 18 f.

judgment of this moral test, and we are authorized in advance to repudiate as essentially anti-Christian everything, by whatever sacred designations current among us, which is not serviceable to righteousness. The more reasonable course, therefore, for the student who would learn from Christian history the actual effect of Christ's mission, must surely be, not the accumulation of Christian crimes, which are admittedly contradictions of the Gospel, and which obviously represent not Christianity, but the absence of Christianity, but rather the recognition and tracing out of the distinctly Christian influences, if there be any such in the Gospel.

And here we may, perhaps, call Count Camille de Renesse as a witness against his own theory. When he tells us that "what Christ really desired was a simple and unostentatious religion, based on love of the Supreme Being and on the

love of humanity—a religion of peace, goodness, and toleration ; of sweetness, charity, and universal brotherhood," we have little disposition to contradict him ; but we are entitled to ask him how such an Ideal would have been preserved at all through the dark and troubled ages of pagan corruption and barbaric confusion apart from the action of the Christian Church. Is it just to accuse of absolute and insolent apostasy a Christendom which, after the lapse of 1900 years, yet cherishes that Ideal, and has secured its application to many tracts of human life ? Granting frankly the crimes of ecclesiastical authority, is it necessary to ignore its great services ? There are many reasons for thinking that Christianity in the future will be far less closely bound up with the hierarchy than in the past : beyond all question the functions of the hierarchy grow fewer as civilization absorbs the

morality of the Gospel, and the State undertakes the moral discipline, intellectual guidance, social ordering, which in earlier phases of economic development were undertaken by the Church. Institutions which have become superfluous and outworn readily acquire worse characteristics and merit less kindly descriptions; and the Christian hierarchy cannot be wholly excluded from the range of this general proposition.

But when all this has been allowed for, and when we have added (as I should be disposed to add) that we have now again reached one of those difficult recurring transition-times, in which Christianity does undergo great modifications of aspect and system, we have not advanced one inch in the direction towards which the Belgian count would lead us. The Christian element in the mingled mass of civilization was never more plainly than now the best and saving element

in it, and that element precisely is traceable to Jesus Christ, regarded not as the amiable victim of persistent and extreme misconstruction, but, as our earliest documents demonstrate that He has from the very first been regarded by His disciples as the Incarnate Truth and Wisdom of God, the only Lord and Saviour of men. We cannot have a more authoritative witness to the original Christian belief about Christ than the Apostle Paul, nor can that Apostle's testimony be more satisfactorily gathered than from the first Epistle to the Corinthians, which ranks among critical scholars as an "undisputed" document. "*We preach*," writes St. Paul, "*Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling-block, and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*"* That was the religion preached

* 1 Cor. i. 23-24.

by the disciples at the first—not, I concede to Count Camille de Renesse, the debased and debasing superstitions with which Christianity, as he sees it in Belgium, is associated—but also far from the frigid homage to "the eternal force which eternally transforms matter,"* which is his own definition of God.

* *Vide* p. 61.

X.

The Root of the Matter.

Among the many inscriptions which adorn or deface the walls of Westminster there is hardly any more interesting to the students of Religion than that which marks the monument of John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, at the north-eastern end of Henry VII.'s chapel. Sheffield himself composed this epitaph, which he clearly designed to be both a description of his character and a confession of his faith. As it stands, the epitaph might have been written by a devout Pagan, but as it originally stood it included a definite reference to Christ. I enclose in brackets the two words which the orthodoxy of Dean Atterbury would not permit to remain.

> Dubius sed non improbus vixi;
> Incertus morior, non perturbatus,
> Humanum est nescire et errare.

[Christum adveneror,] Deo confido,
Omnipotenti benevolentissimo:
Ens entium, miserere mei.

We may put it into English thus:

Doubtful I lived, but still at heart was right;
Wav'ring I die, but not with mind disturbed.
To know not is man's burden, and to stray.
[Christ I revere] in God I put my trust.
God, the All-mighty and most Merciful,
Being of Beings, deign to pity me.

Dean Atterbury was sharply criticised at the time, and has been sharply criticised since by his distinguished successor, Dean Stanley, for having insisted on excluding the word "adveneror" as "not full enough for Christ;" and it is impossible not to regret an official interference which has done some wrong to Sheffield's memory, and which has affixed to the walls of Westminster a religious confession which, as it stands, is frankly non-Christian. Yet the Jacobite Dean

had more justification than his critics have allowed, for in 1720, when Sheffield died, the Deist controversy was beginning to wax hot, and there was no slight danger of men's minds becoming confused on that which is the vital element in Christianity, viz., the Supremacy of Christ as Himself constituting the complete and final Revelation of God. A Christian is not merely a Theist who reveres Christ, but a Theist who worships God in Christ, and finds in the Gospel a satisfying version of the Divine Character as well as an authoritative declaration of the Divine will.

The Evangelists relate that at a certain point in His ministry, Christ insisted on requiring from His disciples a definite judgment upon Himself. The episode is recorded by all the Synoptists with slight but characteristic variations, and is of such consequence to our present argument that we may well reproduce it in full :

St. Matt. xvi. 13-20.

Now when Jesus came into the parts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying : Who do men say that the Son of man is ? And they said, Some say John the Baptist ; some Elijah ; and others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am ? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art Thou, Simon Bar-Jonah : for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I also say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church ; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Then charged he the disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ.

St. Mark viii. 27-30.

And Jesus went forth, and his disciples, into the villages of Cæsarea Philippi : and in the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Who do men say that I am ? And they told him saying, John

the Baptist; and others, Elijah: but others, One of the prophets. And he asked them, But who say ye that I am? Peter answereth and saith unto Him, Thou art the Christ. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.

ST. LUKE ix. 18-21.

And it came to pass, as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Who do the multitudes say that I am? And they answering said, John the Baptist: but others say, Elijah; and others, that one of the old prophets is risen again. And he said unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Peter answering said, The Christ of God. But he charged them, and commanded them to tell this to no man.

It will be noticed that St. Matthew interpolates between the confession of St. Peter and Christ's charge to the disciples not to make public the fact of His Messiahship, a solemn benediction of the Apostle, and a promise that he (Peter) should be the rock (petra) on which an everlasting Christian Church should be built. I do not here enter on the critical

questions which have been raised with respect to this remarkable interpolation, but the interpolation itself has a certain importance for my present purpose as indicating, what indeed lies on the surface of the narrative, the decisive character of this recognition of Christ as the Messiah. The second generation of Christians—and we shall probably be right in regarding the compiler of St. Matthew's Gospel as belonging to that generation—regarded this episode as the turning-point in Christ's Ministry, for Christianity as they knew it was essentially the recognition of Christ as God's Messiah, and the historic confession of that truth was properly the basis of the Christian Church. Granting freely that the disciples had at first a very inadequate notion of what was implied in that Messiahship which they had been led to acknowledge in their Master, we cannot fail to admit that their subsequent history, and the whole course of Christian

experience since their time, and the very theory of the Christian Religion as it has been presented from the first, combine to justify the critical importance ascribed to St. Peter's confession. It is something more than rhetoric to say that Christ's interrogation of His disciples as to their estimate of Himself is repeated in the process of every discipleship. The root of the matter consists necessarily in a decision with respect to Christ, and an act of will by which that decision is made a motive for obedience and a principle of action.

The earliest documents we possess exhibit Christianity as summed up in the confession of Christ's Lordship. "*No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit,*" * writes St. Paul to the Corinthians, and at this point even his large charity drew the line between the

* 1 Cor. xii. 3.

fellow-Christian and the religious opponent. "*If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema.*" * He described the task of the Christian Ministry as gathered up in the assertion of Christ's Lordship. "*We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*" † His canon of orthodoxy was expressed in the article of love for Christ. "*Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in uncorruptness,*" ‡ is the final salutation in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Among the earliest Christians Christ was described as, in a distinctive sense, "*the Lord,*" and His sole Lordship was contrasted with the "*lords many*" of paganism. "*For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as there are gods many and lords many; yet to us there is*

* 1 Cor. xvi. 22. † 2 Cor. iv. 5.
‡ Eph. vi. 24.

one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto Him : and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him." * It is clear that into the " Lordship " thus continually emphasized in the epistles, there has entered a richness of meaning which did not belong to the " Messiahship " as originally conceived. This new and more mysterious element is the result of the conviction that the Messiah, who had been rejected and crucified, had risen from the dead, and was living in conscious and morally effective correspondence with His disciples.

The Resurrection of Christ, beyond all doubt, was pleaded by the Apostles as the justification for the sublime character which they ascribed to their Master. The opening verses of the Epistle to the Romans are sufficient illustration of a

* 1 Cor. viii. 5-6.

conception of Christ which may fairly be said to penetrate and colour all St. Paul's epistles. "*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, which He promised afore by His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, Who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, Who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead ; even Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations, for His name's sake : among whom are ye also, called to be Jesus Christ's : to all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints : Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"* It followed that the Resurrection of Christ became, in the Apostolic preaching, the very core

* Rom. i. 1-7.

of the Gospel. "*If Christ hath not been raised, then*"—says St. Paul—"*is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain.*"* It was not merely or, I think, mainly, as a miracle, demonstrating the Divine Authority of their message—though, of course, this aspect was recognised—but as a Divine Authentication of Christ's Mission, a Divine Sealing of His testimony, a Divine Sanction on His character and Life, in a word, a Divine Justification for their Worship of Him that the Resurrection came to have this critical importance among the first preachers of Christianity. To preach the Resurrection was necessarily to announce as living and present with them their risen Lord, and to assume that their announcement would be sufficiently proved by His action. Thus the truth of the Gospel was always requiring and receiving the

* 1 Cor. xv. 14.

attestation of experience, and every fresh convert, knowing in himself the power of Christ and displaying in his conduct the moral reformation which that power enabled, became a new witness of the Resurrection. St. Paul's words describe the method of Christianity and the moral proof of its truth. Christ is confessed as a living Person, Whose influence is bearing powerfully on the disciple, and the effect of this influence is apparent in a transformation of character. "*For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him Who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are*

passed away; behold, they are become new."* This declaration of St. Paul may be justly described as typical: it utters the conviction of every genuine convert to Christianity, and it remains the best summary of the case for Christianity that I know. So regarded it implies an appeal to history on the one hand, and to personal experience on the other. Christianity has behind it a record of nearly nineteen centuries, and the question cannot but be asked, "Has St. Paul's statement as to Christ's personal influence on His disciples been justified in human experience? Here, it seems to me that the witness of history is both luminous and decisive. We have had occasion to say much about the moral failure of ecclesiastical Christianity and about the perplexities which cannot but be suggested to our minds by the state

* 2 Cor. v. 14-17.

of Christendom ; but all this only throws into the greater prominence the fact, not less astonishing in itself than vital to our present argument, that throughout the whole course of Christian history, and more apparently than ever in the Christendom of our own day, the element of moral vigour within Christianity, and the principle of moral recovery within the Church have been precisely connected with the Personal influence of Jesus Christ. To set out the proofs of this statement in any fulness would involve a review of Christian history from the first, but their nature and cogency can be seen at a glance when we remember that the veneration of mankind has been given most freely to those " saints " who are allowed to be most Christlike ; that these without exception confessed themselves to be what they were by virtue of Christ's influence upon them ; that in the evolution of morality, as now we

understand it, the personal example of Christ has been the most effectual and salutary factor; that in the successive reformations which have restored to the Church some measure of spiritual power the true agent has always been the Gospel itself; that in our own time the most powerful force making for social amelioration is the force of Christian enthusiasm aroused and sustained by a personal devotion to Christ.

All this seems to me to be "writ large" on the record of Christian history, and I can find nothing in the least parallel to it in the history of any other religion. Where can we trace the influence of the Founder of Buddhism apart from the philosophy he taught and the religious system which has grown up on the basis of his teaching? That Gautama himself was a sweet and lovable person, whose influence on those with whom he came into contact was great and beneficent,

appears to be certain; but there is nothing in the story of Buddhism, so far as I can discover, to show that that personal influence survived in any more effective form than the very slight impression of an example, faintly discernible and ever more remote. The Founder of Buddhism is, I think, the only individual who could, without extravagance, be proposed as a possible rival to the Founder of Christianity. Confucius, Zoroaster, and Mohammed evidently stand on a lower level, and the philosophers of Greek and Rome were not religion founders at all. The unique permanence in unlessened power of Christ's personal influence seems to my thinking a fact of the utmost suggestiveness which must take a prominent place in any complete statement of the case for Christianity. When the crucial question which determines discipleship is seriously faced by a modern inquirer, he cannot reasonably

leave out of his reckoning a fact so astonishing in itself, which can only be explained by a very exalted theory of Christ's character, a theory so exalted that even the traditional language of the Christian Church with respect to its Founder cannot be forthwith dismissed as extravagant. Let it be here observed that it is this view of Christ which, in the order of actual experience, must first be considered, for the Christian Church is an existing institution, aggressive and insistent, proclaiming the right of its Founder to every man's homage, and urging all men to examine His claims. The second step in the process of inquiry is to investigate the documents. Do they or do they not allow the view of Christ which the facts of Christian history suggest ? Is the uniqueness of His influence in succeeding ages the reflection and survival of an unique character and an unique life ? What is the verdict of

Christ's history on the suggestion of Christian experience? In answering these questions it appears to me essential, on the one hand, to make sure that the historical inquiry is honest and thorough, and, on the other hand, to remember the inexorable limitations which attach to its conclusions. The knowledge attainable by the means of historical investigation is never really more than partial. It is always conceivable that it may be modified or reversed by the emergence of new testimony; but the degree of insecurity admits of almost infinite gradations, from moral certainty (which yet is not certainty) to the faintest balance of probability, which a featherweight in the scale could reverse.

In the case of the Founder of Christianity a very high degree of certitude may be reached by a careful and honest inquirer, for the documents, though from a modern standpoint they may seem

slight and ambiguous, are relatively full and clear.

Christ lived in one of the literary epochs of the world, and His life was recorded, so far as the main portion of the record is concerned, by His own contemporaries. The modern student of the New Testament is better placed for forming an estimate of His character than is the student of any other Religion-Founder's life. There really is no comparison in point of evidential quality between the New Testament and the documents from which an account of Gautama or of Mohammed must be drawn. An interval of at least one hundred and fifty years elapsed between the death of the Founder of Buddhism and the compilation of the earliest Buddhist documents which have reached us; and the first work on Mohammed that we know of was composed at least a century after the prophet's death; but in the case of Jesus

Christ it appears to be certain that the bulk of the Synoptic tradition was in writing before the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and that the genuine epistles of St. Paul, including certainly seven and probably ten out of the canonical thirteen, were composed before that apostle's death about the year A.D. 65.

This superiority in point of time, however, is even less considerable than that in point of quality, and no one who has taken the pains to institute a comparison between the New Testament and the corresponding Buddhist and Mohammedan documents can regard without impatience the exaggerated contempt expressed in some quarters for the historical materials of the Life of Christ. Such as they are—and on a fair review of all the circumstances we maintain that they are extremely satisfactory, both in extent and in character—these documents of the New Testament are all we possess,

and it is to them that the historical question must be addressed, and from them that the verdict of History on Christ's life and Character must be received. We have insisted on the necessity of honest inquiry, and pointed out the inexorable limits within which the verdict must be confined. Bearing both cautions in mind, can it be in the least doubtful that the suggestion of Christian experience receives from the documents all the confirmation which is possible? If the history of Christianity reveals in the undying influence of Jesus Christ on individuals and in the Church an absolutely unique fact, it is also true that the Gospels set before us in Him, who is the historic fountain of that stream of salutary inspiration, an absolutely unique Person. The key of the Christian creed fits the lock of the Christian facts as history certifies them in the past, and as we perceive them in

the present. Reason has fulfilled its ministry, and must give place to another and a still trustier guide. When we cross the Rubicon of religious decision, and unite ourselves by an act of solemn self-surrender to the company of Christ's followers, we have entered the territory of Faith, and must take account of new spiritual factors. That personal influence of Christ, which we have wondered at in history and traced to its historic source, now bears directly upon ourselves, and begins to create its own effectual authentications. The argument for Christianity ceases to be external only or mainly, and becomes internal.

Deep words of the Gospel find now their interpretation. "*Jesus therefore answered them and said, My teaching is not mine, but His that sent me. If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself.*"* The

* S. John vii. 16, 17.

personal claim of Christ to the plenary allegiance of the human spirit necessarily allies itself with the native religiousness of man, and becomes absorbed into the worship of God. "*Let not your heart be troubled,*" runs the appeal to His followers, "*ye believe in God, believe also in Me.*"* The faith in Christ, thus identified with Religion itself, necessarily utters itself in conduct, for it is still, though in a higher sense, the faith of a disciple in the Master, who has won his trust, and the law of that faith is imitation, the passionate desire to be like Christ; and so the cycle of experience is traversed anew by every individual believer, and in the end the proofs of Christianity are within the disciple himself. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit logically grows from the attempt of believers to interpret the facts of their

* S. John xiv. 1.

own inner life, and at every point it rests on experience. "*The Spirit himself,*" writes St. Paul, "*beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*"* Such language, of which there is much in the New Testament, and very much in the literature of Christianity, is simply unintelligible outside the circle of believers. Their enthusiasm and their certitude are alike unintelligible, and yet when both are seen in direct and unquestionable connection with moral conflict ever more plainly victorious, who can reasonably doubt the profound validity and immense suggestiveness of both. "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*"† Moral

* Rom. viii. 16, 17. † S. John iii. 8.

conflict proceeds on the "stricken field" of every human life, and there are mystic links which bind into the eternal warfare of the Spirit all the separate strivings of men: so inevitably it follows that Christianity, by offering its true credentials in the fact of its own moral power, shows itself in contact with the ultimate problem of our spiritual experience, and meets precisely the demand which underlies the religious instinct itself. Thus the case for Christianity includes many elements which cannot easily be brought into the precise apologies, which are generated by contemporary rationalism. Before the Gospel can be reasonably considered there must be at least agreement in the postulate of Theism, and as following from that, in the moral responsibility of man. Apart from that basis of agreement, discussion of Christianity can but be futile at best, it may easily be also deeply mischievous.

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